THE HAND OF HEROUBA by KERN L. PERC

25¢

Adventure

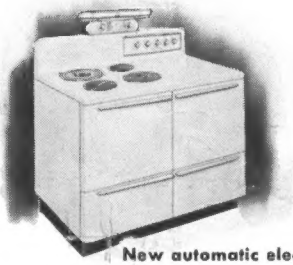
POPULAR PUBLICATIONS

AUG.

DU BOIS • SURDEZ • BOSWORTH • AND OTHERS

Your "year ahead" gas range

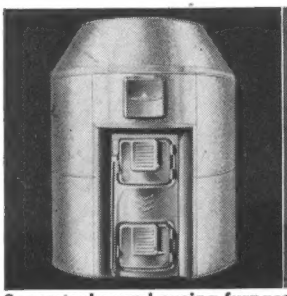
A year ahead
1947 models
Now!



New automatic electric range

KALAMAZOO'S

Big News



Supersteel round casing furnace

New combination range

New coal and wood range

"Cold-Keeper" electric refrigerator

New Luxury Gas Range 40" wide . . . at a price that sets the pace in value

You're years ahead with this new Gas Range in beauty, design, workmanship, value. Full 18" "Thermagic" oven. "Flame-Ray" tenderizing broiler. One-piece "Uniflow" top. Extra storage in ball-bearing compartments.

See the greatest group of range and furnace values in Kalamazoo history. Also refrigerators and washing machines. See them soon at your nearest Kalamazoo store or department store. Write today for information about dealer franchise.

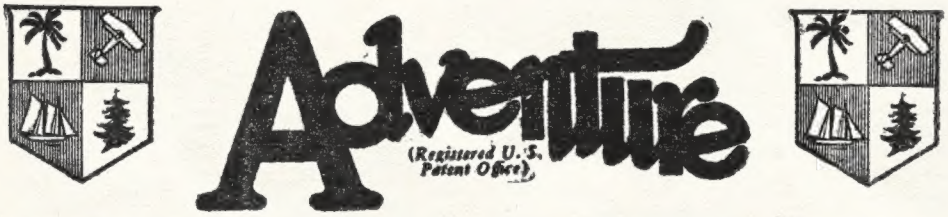
KALAMAZOO STOVE & FURNACE CO.
501 Rochester Ave., Kalamazoo 6, Mich.

HOME APPLIANCES BY
KALAMAZOO

QUALITY LEADERS SINCE 1901

THE GANGSTER CAME TO COLLECT, BUT THEN...
KEITH GRAY, ACE MOVIE DIRECTOR, HAS JUST PRESENTED STARLET EVE WENDY TO HIS ACTOR-SON, JOEL, WHEN A TOUGH STRANGER ENTERS THE DRESSING ROOM...
BIG TONY DON'T LIKE TO LOSE $5000 AT DICE, GRAY. I'M HERE TO GET IT BACK
I-I-T'S NOT HERE
JG
SO-O-O. THE DOUGH'S IN YOUR HOTEL ROOM, HUH? THEN SEND YOUR PAL HERE... AND HE'S GOT JUST 10 MINUTES OR ELSE...
I'LL GO, SON
MY SON GAMBLING WITH THUGS! THIS COULD MAKE A NASTY SCANDAL
IT WORKED! IT WORKED! AND HE SAID MY ACTING WOULDN'T FOOL A CHILD!
COME ON, NOW! A QUICK CHANGE AND A SHAVE BEFORE HE GETS BACK!
WHAT A SWELL BLADE! NEVER HAD A QUICKER, SMOOTHER SHAVE!
THIN GILLETTES REALLY RATE. THEY'RE MIGHTY KEEN AND LAST A LONG TIME
HERE'S THE MON-- WHY, WHERE'S THAT THUG?
RIGHT HERE, DAD. THE MAN YOU SAID COULDN'T ACT—LARRY PHELPS!
HE'S HANDSOME
TO THE NEW STAR OF "LITTLE AUGIE, GANGSTER"
...AND HIS LEADING LADY!
WHAT A GIRL!
A THIN GILLETTE SHAVE ALWAYS MAKES A HIT
FOR PLEASANT, COMFORTABLE SHAVES THAT PEP YOU UP, USE THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE PLENTY KEEN AND LONG-LASTING. ALSO THEY'RE MADE TO FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR PRECISELY, SO THEY PROTECT YOU FROM THE IRRITATION OF MISFIT BLADES. ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES
THIN Gillette BLADES
4 for 10¢

◆ ◆ ◆ THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE WILL



Vol. 115, No. 4 for August, 1946 Best of New Stories

NOVELETTES

The Hand of Herouba..... KERN L. PERC 8

The man was a thief. I knew that the first time our paths crossed at Dire Daoua, that hotbed of intrigue at the terminus of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway, for he was shackled and in the goatskin pouch he carried reposed the awful, ever-present reminder of his pilfering past—a severed, withered hand. But he spoke with the arrogance of a true prophet. "Today," he said, "my life is in your hands. Tomorrow yours will rest in mine, and this hand shall preserve it." He didn't say to which hand he referred—the slender left which clutched the goatskin or the mummied right within the pouch—nor did I quiz him. I'd had all the sales talk I needed to induce me to invest in Herouba. Even now—thirty years later—I value my life at many times the forty-five thalers his freedom cost me.

Aces Over Eights.....WILLIAM DU BOIS 84

It was a furlough, in a manner of speaking, for Brevet-Captain Carter and the irrepressible Sergeant Grady. At least they wore apple-green broadcloth instead of mud-daubed uniforms and drank iced champagne in place of luke-warm swamp water. But despite it all Grady would rather have been back in the Spanish-moss hung fastnesses of the Everglades chasing Indians than in a plush New Orleans gaming salon trying to lay a ghost. After all, a Seminole was something you could set your teeth into, as he'd demonstrated on more than one occasion. But voodoo spooks were something else again. Hardly fair foemen for a soldier who'd been brought up on Creeks and diamond-backs.

SHORT STORIES

Point for a Star..... ALLAN R. BOSWORTH 32

It was young Johnnie Barton's first time up the Trail and the kid had learned a lot from his idol, Big Jim Ketchum, on that dusty cattle-drive from the Cibolo to the cowboy capital of the world—for Jim was a born leader and a fighting man. But the final lesson, there in the Lady Gay Saloon in Dodge City—the one time Big Jim *wouldn't* fight—was the real beginning of wisdom for Johnnie.

Published monthly by Popular Publications, Inc., at 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, 16, Illinois. Editorial and Executive Offices, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. Henry Steeger, President and Secretary, Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice-President and Treasurer. Entered as second-class matter October 2, 1935, at the Post Office, at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1946, by Popular Publications, Inc. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and Pan American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Title registered in U. S. and Canadian Patent Offices. Single copy, 25 cents. Annual subscription for U. S. A., its possessions and Canada, $2.50; other countries, 75c additional. Send subscriptions to 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. For advertising rates, address Sam J. Perry, 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts, enclose stamped, self-addressed envelope for their return, if found unavailable. The publishers will exercise care in the handling of unsolicited manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. Any resemblance between any character, appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional. Printed in the U. S. A.

BE OUT ON AUGUST 9TH ◆ ◆ ◆

Hellions for Hilo ..... STEVE HAIL 40

Captain Blinker Jones of the blue-water freighter *Fair Isle* didn't know the difference between a hack and a main and didn't care if he never learned. Particularly after the freight department had turned his vessel into a ruddy floating farmyard with fighting cocks crowing from every porthole and irate bantams wallowing in the bilge.

Ten Minutes with the Great ..... GEORGES SURDEZ 48

It was the sixty-third time Bill Coyle had climbed through the ropes as a professional, so of course he'd felt no stage fright. He didn't jitter half as much as he did in Vince's Bar & Grill the night he defended the championship—between drinks—in the tensest title match any boxer ever fought.

Salt on the Braid ..... R. W. DALY 56

When Lieutenant Gates reported to His Majesty's thirty-two-gun frigate *Havoc* the gold on his epaulettes gleamed bright as any new-minted coin fresh from the treasury of the realm. And the spirit he showed toward the ship and his fellow officers bore, unfortunately, a similar yellow hue. However, a bit of salt-sea tarnishing can do wonders for a man's character as well as his uniform and when he descended the gangplank three weeks and a stiff bit of action later Gates was, you might say, a new man—even if his braid was slightly worn.

The Lord and Uncle Ax ..... BYRON W. DALRYMPLE 70

"The Lord," said Uncle Ax, "worketh in strange ways." He was sure right but he underestimated the Lord. *How* strange he never knew till we moved to Slashing Creek where he was granted, by Heavenly dispensation, the one thing he'd always hankered for—along with the worst licking of his life.

The Pocket of Wun Tu Foo ..... FRANKLIN GREGORY 77

God knows I've seen my share of stiffs—what reporter hasn't?—and a South Philly police beat's no rosier than any other. I've seen 'em smashed by trains, riddled by Tommy-gun bullets, with their necks elongated after dutching it at the end of a rope, and waterlogged after soaking four weeks in the Delaware. But Cortese had me and the coroner both stumped. Big, healthy guys like that don't just croak from nothin'. Unless Wun Tu Foo's around to put the death-snatch on 'em. Then, of course, they don't have a Chinaman's chance.

THE SERIAL

Sword Land (2nd of 4 parts) ..... HENRY JOHN COLYTON 108

Wherein the conquest of Ireland continues. Wexford and Ossory fall to the long sword of the invader and are given in fief to their Norman conquerors by King Dermot—the paths of Fitz-Brian and the Lady Ceredwin cross once more, on a lonely moorland—and tragedy bestrides the ruined fortress of Dun Cathach.

THE FACT STORY

Vanishing Islands ..... VINCENT H. GADDIS 67

With three-fourths of the earth's surface covered with water it's no wonder navigators have a hard time keeping track of their landfalls. And when many of those "fixed" points on the charts refuse to stay where they belong—disappear permanently or, what's worse, pop up in spots where they have no business being—it only adds to the confusion!

DEPARTMENTS

The Camp-Fire ..... Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 6

Ask Adventure ..... Information you can't get elsewhere 135

Ask Adventure Experts ..... The men who furnish it 137

Lost Trails ..... Where old paths cross 144

The Trail Ahead ..... News of next month's issue 143

Cover Painted for Adventure by Peter Stevens

Kenneth S. White, Editor

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

IT'S a crowded *Camp-Fire* this month despite the fact that only two recruits to our Writers' Brigade stand by to be mustered in. Byron W. Dalrymple, whose adventure in militant backwoods Bible-banging—"The Lord and Uncle Ax"—appears on page 70, introduces himself thuswise—

Nowadays, when I look back to the time when I was a kid, and consider what seemed then to be a collection of perfectly normal relatives and family, I have to chuckle. You see, they only APPEARED run-of-the-mill at that time, because I was so closely associated with them. What they REALLY were, those good people, was a collection of as wild-eyed Irish ancestors as could be raked together.

There was my great-grandfather, whom I never knew, who raised horses on his backwoods Michigan farm—but never bothered to break them. Nor did he sell them. He'd put up an itinerant horse-trader for days at a time, constantly dickering, giving the poor man occasional rays of hope. But the climax was always the same: The old man just liked the dickering for its own sake. "Faith," he'd say (so I'm told), after a fine offer had finally come through, "and ye couldn't 'ave 'em for a million each. Thim 'orses, man, I keep around because I like to see 'em run!"

There was my immediate grandfather, who could tell as good a "coon story" as any kid would want to hear. There was the obscure and vile-tempered relation (they all were mighty quick-tempered, for that matter) who killed his balky horse by bashing it over the head with a rail, then walked home, rather proud of having shown the "bloody horse who was boss." There was Uncle Barzalus (really a great-uncle) who was (so he said) instructed by the good Lord to clear a patch of timber near his logwoods cabin and plant it to clover, so that he and his family might be saved when the great forest fire, which was one day coming, swept through. He planted the clover, the fire did come, and the green clover DID save their hides—while a great many others in the vicinity were burned to death!

My mother, who always greatly enjoyed all the antics, good and bad, which the various "tribes" were constantly up to, loved to tell—and still does—about them. It was from her, over the years, that I finally pieced together the actual background, as well as the tamer side which I had first considered. It must have been at least twenty-five years ago that I first heard the tale of the man, who, she said, had lived near us, and had dared God to drop in and fight him to a draw over his blown-down barn. The tale, which she thought quite comical—and she is far from an irreligious woman—stuck in my mind, along with tales of Uncle Barzalus, and great-uncle Jerry who was known far and wide as the best rough-and-tumble fighter in our vicinity.

I had always thought someday I'd put all of them together and shake up a fiction story. The result was "The Lord and Uncle Ax."

As to my own background: I graduated from the University of Michigan in 1932, spent a number of years as a musician with dance bands, a term in New York as a musical arranger, another in Hollywood doing the same, but finally got back to my first ambition, writing. Today, writing is my full-time job. At present I'm living in a trailer, trying to see all over again the thousands of miles of country I once saw from bus and train windows, while traveling with various name bands.

VINCENT H. GADDIS, who also makes his first appearance on our contents page this month, is a professional magician—a member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians—and once worked as assistant to the late famous Howard Thurston. An investigator of psychic phenomena, reports of his researches in that field have appeared in various technical publications. Unsolved mysteries of the sea and strange oceanic phenomena are his particular province for research.

KERN L. PERC'S last story in these pages, "Charlie Lynxear and the Law" in the February issue, was laid, as you'll recall, in the wilderness of Michigan's upper peninsula. When "The Hand of Herouba" arrived at our desk we wrote the author, remarking that it was quite a leap in locale

(Continued on page 139)

A MAGIC CARPET— MADE OF PAPER!

YES, thousands of ambitious men transformed I. C. S. coupons into "magic carpets," on which they rode to success and prosperity. The coupons they mailed brought them information, and when they learned how little it costs to enroll for I. C. S. training, and how clearly and understandably I. C. S. presents the most involved subjects, they jumped at the chance to get a solid foundation for success—*modern training!* I. C. S. offers you a way to acquire sound, practical training in a surprisingly short time. Act now! Mail this coupon for information.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 3280-V, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course *before* which I have marked X:

Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Heating ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Refrigeration ☐ Steam Fitting

Chemistry Courses
- ☐ Chemical Engineering
- ☐ Chemistry, Analytical
- ☐ Chemistry, Industrial
- ☐ Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel
- ☐ Petroleum Refining ☐ Plastics
- ☐ Pulp and Paper Making

Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses
- ☐ Architectural Drafting
- ☐ Architecture
- ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Civil Engineering
- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Contracting and Building
- ☐ Highway Engineering
- ☐ Lumber Dealer
- ☐ Reading Structural Blueprints
- ☐ Sanitary Engineering
- ☐ Structural Drafting
- ☐ Structural Engineering
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

Communications Courses
- ☐ Electronics
- ☐ Practical Telephony
- ☐ Radio, General
- ☐ Radio Operating
- ☐ Radio Servicing
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering

Electrical Courses
- ☐ Electrical Drafting
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Light and Power
- ☐ Lighting Technician
- ☐ Practical Electrician

Internal Combustion Engines Courses
- ☐ Auto Technician ☐ Aviation
- ☐ Diesel-Electric
- ☐ Diesel Engines ☐ Gas Engines

Mechanical Courses
- ☐ Aeronautical Engineering
- ☐ Aircraft Drafting
- ☐ Flight Engineer
- ☐ Foundry Work
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals
- ☐ Industrial Engineering
- ☐ Industrial Metallurgy
- ☐ Machine Shop
- ☐ Mechanical Drafting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mold-Loft Work
- ☐ Patternmaking—Wood, Metal
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Drafting
- ☐ Sheet-Metal Worker
- ☐ Ship Drafting ☐ Ship Fitting
- ☐ Tool Designing
- ☐ Toolmaking
- ☐ Welding—Gas and Electric

Railroad Courses
- ☐ Air Brake ☐ Car Inspector
- ☐ Diesel Locomotive
- ☐ Locomotive Engineer
- ☐ Locomotive Fireman
- ☐ Railroad Section Foreman

Steam Engineering Courses
- ☐ Boilermaking
- ☐ Combustion Engineering
- ☐ Engine Running
- ☐ Marine Engineering
- ☐ Steam Electric ☐ Steam Engines

Textile Courses
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Rayon Weaving
- ☐ Textile Designing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing

Business and Academic Courses
- ☐ Accounting ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Arithmetic ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business Correspondence
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Certified Public Accounting
- ☐ Commercial
- ☐ Cost Accounting
- ☐ Federal Tax
- ☐ First Year College
- ☐ Foremanship ☐ French
- ☐ Good English ☐ High School
- ☐ Higher Mathematics
- ☐ Illustrating ☐ Motor Traffic
- ☐ Postal Service
- ☐ Salesmanship ☐ Secretarial
- ☐ Sign Lettering
- ☐ Spanish ☐ Stenography
- ☐ Traffic Management

*Name*_____ *Age*_____ *Home Address*_____

*City*_____ *State*_____ *Present Position*_____

*Working Hours*_____ *A.M. to*_____ *P.M.* **Length of Service in World War II**_____

Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.
British residents send coupon to I. C. S., 71 Kingsway, London, W. C. 2, England.

THE HAND OF

ILLUSTRATED BY
HAMILTON GREENE

HEROUBA

By
KERN L. PERC

HEROUBA was a thief, I knew that; but it was hardly the reason for my impulsive act. I certainly did not consider him a kindred spirit, this shackled yet arrogant cripple, although I too was there to steal! That he could serve any useful purpose in my risky enterprise, I gave no thought. I felt then that I wanted only, and could trust only, Jacques and Carter, the two most gifted colleagues in counter-espionage in the Eastern Hemisphere, whose separate ways into this Abyssinian hotbed of intrigue were due to converge with my own.

Only they, together with the ample funds for bribery in my money belt and the costly kit of cunningly wrought small tools lying flat in the morocco case against my skin, would be needed once we had gained access to Ras Mulu Godouy's stronghold in the mountains many miles to the west.

It was probably when he made his first prediction that I began yielding to Ato Herouba's spell, and the instinct that had kept me alive and at large until then gave me no warning of his later dominance of my affairs.

"Today my life is in your hands. Tomorrow your life will rest in mine, and this hand shall preserve it!" He spoke with the manner, and indeed the verity, of a true prophet.

The captive was unarmed and bore only a long staff, in the cleft end of which was a folded paper, a common device used by native runners.

● ● ●

I took his "tomorrow" with a grain of salt. The Amharic *naga* of Ethiopia means about the same as the *mañana* of Mexico—any time in the future.

I didn't even ask him to which hand he referred: the slender left hand clutching the goatskin pouch at his chest, or the mummified right hand which the pouch contained. Both were his; the latter having been severed from the ugly stump thrust out from the folds of his soiled cotton *shama*.

That was how I knew him to be a thief—one of the reasons why I wished to be kicked for buying his freedom. Amputation for stealing was the common practice then; less costly to the local authorities than incarceration of the convict, and certainly a more effective deterrent to the light-fingered. I had seen many of these maimed felons during my rambles throughout the scattered provinces of Menelik II; had viewed them all with scant pity, until Fate literally threw me athwart the chain that held Herouba to his squat Somali keeper.

Maybe it wasn't pity even then. Certainly the qualities that had earned me the tough assignment I was filling allowed but little room for such emotion.

Perhaps some subconscious prescience impelled me to invest in Herouba. Anyway, it was a lucky hunch. My life, even now, I consider to be worth many times the forty-five thalers his freedom cost me.

I WAS shouldering my way through the clamoring, sweating, gesticulating throng at the Dire Daoua terminal of the Franco-Ethiopian railroad when first I met Herouba. This was in the days when Emperor Haile Selassie was only Tafari Makonnen, a stripling in the vermin-infested barracks at Harar, although the old Ras Makonnen even then had his vulpine eyes on the throne and was grooming his son to be *negus negesti*, king of kings.

The railroad, the slowest in the world and certainly the costliest to ride, at that time ran only 309 kilometres, from Djibouti on the French Somaliland coast to Dire Daoua. The present tortuous stretch of 476 kilometres beyond Dire Daoua, through the volcanic regions and over the plateau to the capital, Addis Ababa, was not completed by the French builders until several years later.

I had need to hurry. It was close to the season of *zanaba*, the rains, and I was anxious to complete arrangements for the trek to Ras Mulu Godouy's chief mountain town before the rutty trail became knee deep in sticky gumbo.

Recollections of the hardships encountered during a previous journey to the interior, when the monotonous downpour had transformed the trail into a glutinous wallow that balked even the patient Shoan mules of my *nagadi*, lent strength to my arms as I plowed a path through the turbulent pack of porters, venders and beggars, *hoi polloi* of many tribes come to meet the train; an event of much excitement in this dreary terminus.

I reached the fringe of the crowd only to be hauled up short by a chain at my waist and a drum-puncturing scream in my ear. It was then I saw Herouba, and first felt the impact of his inscrutable eyes, intangible yet more compelling than physical force.

The scream was not Herouba's. It came from the loose lips of a greasy, thick-set Somali to whom he was shackled with a yard long chain.

"*Minu a'dahlu?*" I demanded angrily as I backed between them away from the chain. The Somali screamed again in Agou, the Hamitic dialect of the lower classes: "You ask me what is this, you who would break the chain and free my debtor, rob me of forty thalers?"

That was ridiculous. I am big and tough—was then, anyway—but the stoutest mule that side of Tigre could not have broken that chain, and that swarthy tub of camel fat knew it. I wanted to punch his sprawling nose. After all these years I still can't understand what made me act as I did. Maybe Lady Luck gave me a nudge; and maybe it was just because my gorge rose at the sight of the handsome, haughty Herouba so incongruously shackled to such a boorish clod, like an eagle chained to a pig!

Anyway, I said: "Only forty thalers? And how much for the chain?"

The Somali licked his slavering lips and spread his filthy fingers. "Five thalers!" That, too, was ridiculous. I knew that I could get any local Guargi blacksmith to duplicate the chain for a couple of *rubs*, about one tenth of what he asked; but I was in no mood to bargain. It was not that I was being magnanimous; I was just plain damn mad. So I waved a *millefranc* note before his greedy eyes, a note worth then about 200 American dollars or ten times the forty-five thalers.

It was then Herouba first spoke: "The debt is but thirty thalers, and the chain is mine!" His speech was Amharic, the language of the upper classes, and amusement vied with arrogance on his finely molded features.

"*A'dlum!*" shrieked the Somali. "No! By the life of Menelik, I swear he lies! Forty thalers! Forty-five with the chain, or"—he gave the chain a savage yank—"I keep you captive until the hyenas lick your bones!"

The closely crowding natives howled at this, probably amused at the idea of hyenas gnawing this agile captive with his fat captor only a yard away.

I spoke to Herouba, in Amharic: "Do you mind if I pay his price?"

Our glances locked again, and then I added: "I would willingly pay ten times forty thalers, had he but asked it!" I meant it, too; and I

had enough *millefranc* notes stuffed in my money belt to choke a hippopotamus. I was well heeled for the job that had brought me back to the Land of the Lion of Judah.

Herouba inclined his head: "It shall be as you wish, *Ferentshi*. Surely, release from this fat jackal can bring no greater misfortune!" He used the term commonly applied to white foreigners as though expressing a title of respect, although it can be freighted with more contempt than "Shankala"—an Amharic term of insult.

The clamor of the crowd seemed suddenly to simmer down to murmurs, and the Somali's bulging eyes hungered avidly for the *millefranc* note for a long moment before he weakly squeaked: "In *birr*! In *birr*! It must be in silver!"

I WAS about to turn to the station agent's office to exchange my paper for silver when a Falasha money changer swung his bag of coins between us, grabbed the *millefranc* note and began fingering Maria Theresa thalers into my palms. He topped the heap with paper *lire* and British pound notes and vanished into the crowd before I had finished counting; but he didn't gyp me so much at that—only about twenty percent. I had been stuck for twice that on more than one occasion, by Armenian or Moslem money changers throughout the empire.

A few minutes later in a Guargi's smithy, deft blows of a chisel severed the iron rivets at the Somali's wrist and Herouba's ex-creditor ambled away, jingling the silver in his camel-bladder pouch and loudly lamenting that it was but one tenth of what he might have had.

Herouba looped the free end of the chain over the stump of his right arm and held it toward me. I shook my head and told the Guargi: "The other, too!"

When this was done, I tossed the chain onto a pile of scrap and turned to Herouba. Already whatever emotion had impelled my act of charity was completely petered out, and the reaction left me with an unpleasant sense of plain damn foolishness. So I curtly told him: "You may go now!"

Herouba stiffened and wrapped his *shama* tightly about him. His large, expressive eyes narrowed as he answered flatly: "I will stay with you until my debt is paid in full!"

"You shall not!" I snapped. "I have much to do, and can't be burdened with a cripple. Nor do I need the services of a—" I stopped. Somehow his look, the very hauteur of the fellow, stopped the word in my throat.

He finished it for me, even smiled when he said it. "Thief?" he suggested smoothly. "You will have much need of my services where you are going! In Addis Ababa, from the Gibbi of the emperor to the *tukuls* far beyond the city, the hand of Herouba and the miracles it has wrought are well known." Then he added, *sotto voce*: "Yes, even in Ras Mulu Godouy's domain!"

"I will stay with you until my debt is paid in full!" said Herouba.

Did he actually know where I was going? For a moment I had a queasy feeling that maybe this had all been a plant; that the Somali had been a confederate and I was being played for a sucker! Some powerful interests were much concerned in the success or failure of my mission, and certainly on previous occasions even more incredible means had been used to thwart my efforts.

I controlled my agitation with an effort, lest he read my thoughts, and coldly replied: "It took *birr*, my silver, to bring about your freedom. Perhaps the magic hand of Herouba does not bother with such minor miracles!"

"Perhaps," he echoed softly. It was then he made the first prediction, and showed me the

desiccated human claw in the goatskin pouch; a gruesome, shrunken counterpart of the graceful left hand that held it for my inspection.

I never had taken much stock in African voodooism, although I had seen some weird things happen in the bush, in the desert, and in the purple mountains of the hinterland; so this ghastly, spicily odoriferous relic of Herouba's affected me but little, except to contort my stomach. Nor will I yet admit that his compelling eyes or the mesmeric force of his sonorous words had aught to do with my yielding. Maybe my sales resistance was low; and maybe it was because I then began really to like him!

"All right, Ato Herouba," I finally agreed; and I didn't say the *Ato* in derision. It's the Amharic for "mister," and thief though he was, his bearing seemed to warrant the title. "I will take you with me, perhaps to Addis Ababa, perhaps on to Gondar—perhaps even farther, if my mission requires it. It may take more than a month, maybe two, maybe three, but beyond one month I shall pay you according to the value of your services."

Herouba smiled again. "That should make me very wealthy. You are now at the zenith of manhood and surely must hold your own life equal to many of the *millefranc* notes you carry!"

He threw the loose end of his *shama* over his shoulder and turned to go, pausing only for one parting twang of my overwrought nerves: "With the rising of the moon, I shall wait upon you at the *tukul* of Sinkae Gabri, your *nagadi*. *Igziabar istalin*, John Gregory!"

God be with me, eh? Well, the devil take you, Herouba! I thought savagely. But he was gone before my throat relaxed enough to let me speak, had blended into the *shama*-clad crowd outside the shop like a snowflake in a drift.

CHAPTER II

A VERY UNCOMMON THIEF

ALL the way to Sinkae Gabri's *tukul*, I kicked at the yapping scavenger street dogs and cursed myself for the impetuous act that might very well make even more hazardous the job I had come to do. I had stuck my neck out before on dangerous assignments, but I could hardly recall a handicap like Herouba. Damn his hide! How did he know my name, and that I would be in Sinkae Gabri's grass-thatched mud home this very evening?

Wise old Sinkae Gabri had been my *nagadi*, my faithful muleteer, on many tough treks in the past. I had cabled a trusted friend in Djibouti to apprise Sinkae of my coming and my need of transportation to the interior.

He welcomed me to his crude hut with a warmth that lifted my spirits, but all during our evening meal of *vod* and *intshera*, the flavorous native stew and flavorless unleavened bread, my mind was harried with thoughts of the crippled thief I had befriended.

When the graceful Gallawoman who attended Sinkae's wants was snoring softly beyond the rush curtains that divided the room, and we were enjoying our post-prandial cups of *tej*, a potent Abyssinian brew, I glumly recounted my afternoon's foolishness.

To my utter astonishment, Sinkae was delighted. "Hakim Herouba!" His eyes glistened in the glow of the sheep fat lamp. "Why, now the success of your mission is assured! Surely, God smiles upon you!"

"Hakim?" I echoed. "A doctor? Why, the fellow's just a common thief; he actually admitted it!"

"A thief, yes," Sinkae answered soberly, "but not a common one—really the most noted one in all Ethiopia. He stole only in the service of his *ras*, the ruler of his province; and then only to recover valuables that another *ras's* subjects had taken. It is well known that it was he who retrieved the ancient scrolls of the Kebra-Nagast upon which were written in the now dead language of Geez the history of Makeda, the Queen of Sheba, of her marriage to King Solomon and the birth of their son Menyelek, whom she called Bayna-Lehkem, 'son of the wise,' and from whom our emperor, Menelik II, descended."

"Herouba's *ras* now has these scrolls?" I asked. Not that I gave a tinker's damn about Ethiopian history, legendary or documentary; but my interest in Hakim Herouba's accomplishments was growing by leaps and bounds. The fellow might serve a useful purpose, after all! Then I recalled his maimed condition and the hopeful bubble burst.

Before I could ask a second question concerning this, Sinkae continued: "No, they are back in the cathedral at Axum from which they were stolen—where the original Ark of the Covenant, which Menyelek brought to Ethiopia after placing a duplicate in Solomon's temple, also rests as it has for centuries. Herouba was commissioned for this task as a service to the church. It was said that he took the scrolls from the person of a wealthy European collector on a ship bound for home. Both the church and his *ras* paid him much homage when he returned."

"But," I persisted, "if he has performed such wonderful services, why should he be today in debtor's chains; why should the hand that had so faithfully served his *ras* be lopped off like that of a common thief? Surely, he should have some influential friends. Is this *ras* then so ungrateful; or did Herouba finally pick his own master's purse just to keep in practice?"

Sinkae Gabri smiled patiently. "I will try to answer your questions in order. The debt you paid today was not Herouba's. I beg you to let that explanation be sufficient. Herouba's loyalty to a friend, whether of high or low degree, is a thing to be cherished. His hand was severed upon orders from another *ras* whose soldiers had taken him captive during one of his missions across the border. This *ras* is the much feared and very powerful Ras Mulu Godouy."

I started involuntarily at the name. Ras Mulu Godouy, the minor king with whom I meant to deal, whether with his knowledge or not! Sinkae hesitated respectfully; then, as I closed my mouth without speaking, he went on: "Ras Mulu Godouy sought to end Herouba's activities for all time by removal of Herouba's famous hand, the hand that could pluck a whisker from the beard of the Abuna all unnoticed. Ah-ee, that such talent should be lost!"

He sighed deeply, sipped his *tej* and continued: "Herouba's own *ras*? Much has happened, my friend, since I last enjoyed serving you. That *ras* now languishes in golden chains in a dungeon deep in the fortress at Harar. Politics change here, sometimes, even as in your own country; although perhaps the means employed to effect those changes may be somewhat different here!"

And how, I thought, and a wave of nostalgia swept over me. But homesickness breeds feelings I had long since found I couldn't afford, so I let my still unquenched curiosity concerning Herouba smother it by asking, "How in the name of the devil did he know my name, and that I would be here tonight? Somehow, Sinkae, that accident this afternoon still leaves a putrid odor in my nostrils, and I feel I am being led like a sand-blinded camel! That, I do not like."

Sinkae stared at his dusky toes for a long moment before replying, and even then embarrassment made him falter.

"I told him, *Ferentshi,*" he said slowly, and he too used the term with respect, as had Herouba. "I thought you would have need of him. I know not your mission this time, but I do know you, and that you travel not for pleasure. Your meeting was, I believe, an accident; a very fortunate one, for the arrangements I sought to make, you have made yourself. You will not regret it. As to your name, I am sure it is on many tongues in many places in Dire Daoua tonight. Time does not so easily erase the memory of such—shall I say excitement?—as your previous visit caused!"

His wise old eyes met mine and we laughed together. "I hope that I am as lucky this time!" I told him heartily.

He sobered quickly. "It is not for me to question, only to serve," he said earnestly, "but I do want, as an old friend, to suggest this. That the more dangerous the mission, the more confidence you repose in Herouba, and you will live to bless me for that advice!"

Sinkae Gabri

I still was dubious. "I can't see," I said morosely, "what earthly use he can be to me now, in his condition: a crippled outcast. I'll grant you that he was quite a lad in his day, and I'll admit I now might use the skill his hand once had; but a pickled claw in a goatskin pouch isn't going to be of much service, no matter what miraculous powers he claims for it. Surely, a man of your wisdom doesn't believe such rubbish!"

For answer Sinkae Gabri swung a bubbling *teff* pot off the embers and held up his hand: "Hark!"

A LOW murmur I had noticed for some time above the bubbling of the pot seemed to increase in volume. It was interspersed with occasional rattle of equipment, like troops moving in the darkness, and the distant ululation of the hyena packs on their nocturnal prowls through the outskirts of the town.

"It may be that your answer, *Ferentshi,* lies outside the door!"

I swung back the goathair curtain at the door and stepped outside. A circle of small fires in front of the *tukul* filled the evening air with pungent fumes of burning camel dung. The glowing embers revealed forty or more squatting white-clad figures, rifles cradled in laps and bandoleers of ammunition across their shoulders.

"Who are you?" I demanded sharply. "Why are you here? Who sent you?"

A tall, majestic figure rose and stood before me, one hand holding a Mauser rifle, the other caressing a wicked-looking *jahmbeer.*

"The hand of Herouba!" he said solemnly. "That the *ferentshi* and his possessions might be safe this night!"

Oddly enough, it was my anger that kept me from unduly offending this huge tribesman, for it couched my answer in English; good, ripe, round American cuss words which probably sounded to him like an ardent benediction!

I stepped back into the *tukul* and again faced my old *nagadi.* "Sinkae, your friend Herouba has already multiplied my burdens; handicapped me with a band of cutthroats, when my most urgent need is speed, speed and secrecy. I tell you, I'll not have this ragtag army heralding my business abroad!"

"Cutthroats?" The wise old muleteer spread his hands placatingly. "Perhaps, but they would not cut *your* throat; they would fight to the death for you! And you *will* have need of them, *Ferentshi,* on the journey you wish to make. Word of the wealth you carry has undoubtedly already gone abroad. It will tempt every village *shum,* every town *kantiba,* every marauding chief through whose domain you pass; and there are others, more powerful ones, to whom news of your sudden death would be

very welcome. It is no longer safe for you to travel without a fighting escort, my friend; nor even to linger in an unguarded *tukul*!"

I eyed him for the first time with suspicion; a feeling I found repellent even then, so long had this old *nagadi* been a faithful friend, but my judgment was already haywired with raw nerves. "Just how much," I demanded harshly, "do *you* know about this mission of mine?"

"It is not for me to know anything about it," he answered quietly. "I shall provide and attend to the mule train for your journey, and defend you with my life if need be. Beyond that, I can only repeat my advice: that you tell Herouba exactly what you intend to accomplish, and it shall be done!"

Herouba! Herouba! Herouba! The name licked my nerves like the rasping tongue of a tiger! What a build-up for an ostracized, mutilated pickpocket whose only asset had been shorn by a butcher's cleaver, and whose neck would probably next feel that cleaver if I took

A tall majestic figure rose and stood before me, one hand holding a Mauser rifle, the other caressing a wicked-looking jahmbeer.

him with me to Mulu Godouy's belligerent province!

For a moment I could only say, "Hell and damnation!" which of course meant nothing to Sinkae Gabri. Then: "Why isn't he here, himself, as he promised?" I asked querulously.

"Did he state the hour of his coming?" asked Sinkae.

"He said he would be here with the rising of the moon," I told him.

"The moon," explained Sinkae, "does not rise this night until nearly cock crow. Herouba will come in the early morning. It is best that you sleep till then."

He prepared a pallet of hides and rushes on the hard-tamped clay. I gulped a generous nightcap of *tej* and stretched out with a grateful sigh. Already the drink and the soporific reaction of spent emotions were making me drowsy; and I had had but little real rest in many days.

"Is he really a doctor?" I asked sleepily as the old *nagadi* covered my tired body with a goathair robe.

"Yes, and a very good one. Sleep now, *Ferentshi*," he added kindly. "You will have much need of your energies tomorrow."

I HAD struggled through a wild phantasmagoria of one-armed bandits, hyenas, heavy chains and avalanches of thalers, and was swimming a torrent of *tej* to rescue the Queen of Sheba, when a voice said in my ear: "Wake up, *Ferentshi*; Herouba is here!"

I sat up in the cool murk of the *tukul*, much relieved to find that the crocodile's grasp on my shoulder was only the *nagadi's* friendly clasp.

"*Dinastlin*, Ato Gregory! *Inde-mindi-nu?*" Herouba stood over me and, as Sinkae blew the embers to an illuminating glow, I saw that his *shama* now was clean and his white cotton jodhpurs seemed new. A hip-length black cape was fastened at his throat. Only people of position go about so garbed in Ethiopia. An involuntary note of respect crept into my echo of his greeting: "Good morning to you, Hakim! And how are you, too?"

His white teeth gleamed at the salutation and he squatted beside me. He leaned toward me and spoke in an undertone: "While the *nagadi* is making ready your mule team and his woman your breakfast, it would be wise to make known to me the services you will require. Herouba's magic"—he grinned wryly as he mouthed the word I had yesterday flung in contempt—"works more effectively in the light of understanding! There is an empty *tukul* nearby where our words will go no further than each other's ears."

Without a word I rose with him and followed him out into the bright moonlight. The huddled forms in the circle of embers rose *en masse* and strode to the adjacent hut into which Herouba led me. A cheerful fire licked a well-peppered pot of *vod* and the furnishings of the one round room seemed opulent compared to Sinkae's. Evidence of an interrupted early morning meal was in the gourds and bowls before the hearth.

Herouba answered my unspoken question. "It was loaned for our conference," he said simply. "You can speak without fear. These walls have no ears, and not even a serpent could wriggle through the Danakil guard outside."

Danakils! The blood-thirstiest battlers of a warrior nation! This fellow certainly meant business, and despite my resentment of his cool, confident dominance of my affairs I felt a growing sense of reliance. I decided then and there to take Sinkae's advice, without any reservations.

"Well," I said, by way of beginning, "perhaps I will have need of a witch doctor, after all!"

His quiet rejoinder set me back on my heels, although his tone carried not one hint of reproof; it was merely matter-of-fact: "I am a graduate of the University of Vienna, Monsieur Gregory, and hold degrees in medicine and surgery—but it is not a doctor you need; it is my ability to accomplish those things you yourself will find impossible!" This in French, spoken like an aristocrat!

I filed away that startling statement for future reference and came quickly to the point. "How much," I asked abruptly, "do you already know concerning my business in Ethiopia?"

"First," he replied promptly, "that you did not arrive by railroad. You came by caravan from the north and hurried to the station to meet someone who disappointed you."

That was true. I had crossed Bab el Mandeb from Arabia in a slave dealer's *dshounka*, debarked in an isolated cove near the Eritrean border and attached myself to a trader's caravan that I knew had reason to skirt the French Somaliland boundary and keep clear of its all too inquisitive, and acquisitive, *askaris*, the officious armed border guards whose probing staves had poked me into trouble more than once. I hadn't dared to risk Djibouti, not this time, not with my credentials, and the long memories and shorter tempers of the officials there!

It was true, too, that I had hoped the train would bring a friend, a much-needed friend—Big Ben Jacques, a cosmopolitan Swiss selected for this mission, even as I, for qualities rarely if ever included in a letter of recommendation.

He was to have landed at Zeila on his British passport, get an Abyssinian *visa* and round the French southern border to Daouenle at the Franco-Ethiopian boundary where he was to board the train for Dire Daoua. Something had gone wrong and I was more than worried, half sick with disappointment and dread; dread that

crystallized into gooseflesh with Herouba's next words.

"Your friend will never come! His bones now lie on the road to Jijigga, beside the tall hill of the ants that picked them clean some days ago. Ras Mulu Godouy's hands reach far, and his agents are many throughout Ethiopia now! A Somali runner brought me the word, and this." He handed me an empty pass case that he took from the pouch at his waist. I didn't need the gilt *B.J.* stamped on its cover to tell me who had owned it!

I could only lick my dry lips and gulp: "Go on!"

His next revelation raised my hair and sank my heart to my boots.

"Neither can the Englishman, Carter, aid you now. His bones, too, lie yet unburied, on the trail beyond Debra Markos. He was a brave man; he suffered much at the hands of Ras Mulu Godouy's henchmen before he died, but the *ras* never did learn the object of his mission—whether merely assassination of the *ras* or recovery of a document that is causing much embarrassment in certain European diplomatic circles. I, however, am sure," he added emphatically, "that murder was not the purpose. The *ras's* death would only serve to complicate

DO YOU KISS AND TELL?
ONLY THAT STAR SHAVES KEEP ME SMOOTHER!
FOR DOUBLE EDGE RAZORS
MADE BY 6NX PROCESS
Star shaves you clean but *gently*, too! This amazing, *new-process* blade is years ahead in low-cost shaving luxury. *Makes your double edge razor perform miracles!*
STAR DOUBLE EDGE
STAR
4 for 10¢
FOR SINGLE EDGE RAZORS
Make the most of your one and only face! Use the one and only single edge Star — the blade that millions of men have proved with *billions* of shaves!
4 for 10¢
Single Edge STAR BLADES
STAR
Star Division, American Safety Razor Corp., B'klyn 1, N.Y.

matters, if that document, signed by the misguided agent of the country you represent, should fall into covetous hands! Am I right, *Ferentshi*?"

FOR a moment I could only nod my head dumbly. Poor old Charlie Carter, a loyal friend of long standing and my tough right arm in more than one perilous adventure! He had said good-bye to us, Jacques and me, when the P & O boat we had boarded at Marseilles touched the Eritrean port of Massawa. It had been considered more expedient that each of us enter Ethiopia by a different route, a precaution that had already proved futile. I knew now that I too was marked for death! Mulu Godouy's far flung tentacles had already trapped both of my aides!

Carter's route was overland by way of Adoua, Gondar and Debra Markos. His death was a shattering blow to the optimism I had felt when we three had undertaken this task. The confidence that had made my name well-known in certain sub-rosa governmental quarters in Europe was now lower than an adder's abdomen. I had only this slender, fantastic cripple to aid me now!

"That agent," I told him, "whose diplomatic *faux pas* placed this deadly tool in Mulu Godouy's avaricious hands is also dead."

"Yes, I know," he replied, "but his death in no way lessens the commitments to which he affixed his government's seal. That agreement in the *ras's* hands can well mean war; war that he would welcome as a means to slake his lust for further power. He has long coveted Menelik's seat in the Gibbi, and he is crafty enough to realize that this document would suffice to incite the other powers who last year signed the treaty with your, ah, employers concerning Ethiopia's boundaries."

I nodded again. There had been a time, weeks before, when I had not been sorry that a trusted diplomat had proved to be an *agent provocateur*. Lending his country's name to a flagrant treaty violation had dumped what I then considered a juicy job into my own lap, if I could pull it off; and I felt then that I could, with the help of Jacques and Carter.

I was sorry now, and wished myself well out of it; but I doubted profoundly if this smooth Amhara before me would let me turn back. That I had caught a Tartar was proving very real!

"Your task," pursued Herouba, "is to retrieve this document, is it not?"

"Yes!" I exploded, and used some more Yankee cuss words that had no Amharic equivalent. "Now, tell me how you came to know all of this, about Jacques and Carter and me, and why we were coming here. And don't give me any more talk of magic! There are things that I too must understand, if we work together!"

"No magic," he replied and smiled wryly. "Not this time! The explanation is quite simple. The Shankala who served you three *ferentshis* on board the ship has profited much by his stupid appearance and his mastery of many European tongues! He came by way of Djibouti on the train many days ago. His information, together with that Sinkae Gabri gave me following receipt of your message to prepare for the journey inland, enabled me through well-placed allies to follow the progress of each of you. I have long known of Mulu Godouy's plans, and I welcome this chance to aid in their frustration. I deeply regret," he added earnestly, "that I was unable to prevent the untimely ends of your friends, and it is my gravest concern that you do not meet a like fate, please believe me!"

His sincerity fanned a spark that had been lying all too dormant. It began a friendship, the deep-down kind that never questions or falters, that I have cherished these many years.

"Do you mind telling me," I asked, "just how you fit into the picture? Surely, Ras Mulu Godouy's ambitions can affect you but little personally."

His gesture was even more eloquent than his spoken reply. His left hand caressed the scarred stump of his right forearm and his white teeth gleamed in the firelight's glow. "He sought to render me useless. We shall see, my friend!"

We saw, all right, although many days afterward, when the hand of Herouba averted a war that might easily have developed proportions rivaling those of the later World War I. I saw it, too, bring retribution to the cruel *ras* whose maiming of Herouba had only multiplied that gallant patriot's effectiveness!

As we rose to return to Sinkae's *tukul*, I voiced the one doubt remaining. "Will you not fear," I asked him, "to return to Mulu Godouy's province? Won't you again be taken, and treated even more harshly next time?"

He shook his head. "The *ras's* followers now consider me quite harmless." Then he added impishly, "If I sense a doubt, I can of course again assume the guise of debtor. The chain should make me seem entirely useless!"

"So," I exclaimed, "that was part of the plan, after all!"

He laughed outright this time. "Perhaps a crude one, *Ferentshi*," he admitted, "but it brought the results I had hoped for. Had that failed, I would have found other means to meet you before you left Dire Daoua. This plan seemed less liable to excite suspicion, and there are many suspicious persons here in the town now. Karu, the fat Somali, played well his part, did he not? He is now well on his way to Addis Ababa. We may have need of him there."

As Sinkae Gabri's comely woman quietly set before us the steaming bowls of *teff*, the hearty

cereal that is the staff of life to many Ethiopians, a sudden disturbing thought struck me. "How on earth," I asked Herouba, "are we going to feed this army of yours on the march?"

"That is arranged," he replied imperturbably. "Each warrior now carries a horn of peas. That, together with the meat they will find enroute, will suffice until we reach a village where the *shum*, a friend of mine, will supply food needed for the rest of the journey. Sinkae's mules will carry skins of water for all. I beg you, *Ferentshi*, to leave such arrangements to me. Your worries should be confined to concern regarding your own safety, and it is wise that we provide insurance for that before we leave this *tukul*."

That insurance was indeed drastic; but even as I protested some of Herouba's precautions, I could sense wisdom in them all.

I stripped to the skin. All of my clothing, including my boots and sun helmet and every stitch in my portmanteau, was wrapped in hides and placed in a hole Sinkae had dug beneath the hearth, covered with clay and the still glowing embers raked back in place. At Herouba's direction, Sinkae then darkened my face, my neck and chest, my hands and arms, and my feet and legs with an evil-smelling mixture of rancid butter and native dye.

"It is unfortunate," Herouba observed with mock gravity, "that your eyes seem so pale in your new complexion. You must cultivate a squint! And your camel-colored hair! Ah, well," he added as he pulled a Danakil headdress of lion's mane down over my already itching scalp, "the *ahkouadah* will cover that!"

All of my *millefranc* notes and papers of identification were placed in camel bladder pouches, sealed with tallow and stowed in the goatskin bags which Sinkae filled with water and grain to be carried by the mules.

"Another *ferentshi* of somewhat your size and appearance," said Herouba, "leaves by caravan this morning for the British Somaliland. Word is being spread around that the Ato Gregory's plans have been changed. That this other is Armenian, not American, may not be discovered before he reaches Berbera on the coast, too late for Mulu Godouy's agents to hinder our own mission."

CHAPTER III

FORCED MARCH TO ADDIS ABABA

WHEN we left Dire Daoua in the waning moonlight of early morning, with my bare feet already resenting the rough trail which bothered the calloused soles of the Danakils not a bit, I was garbed as a native warrior from *ouras* to *koulabets*, from head to heels, and carried a rifle of ancient make, a horn of

Hakim Herouba

peas and a hippopotamus-hide bandoleer filled with a heterogeneous collection of cartridges, about a half dozen of which would fit the rifle!

The only comforting touches were those of my shoulder holster with its hard hitting single-action Colt .45 and the morocco case with my priceless lock picks and pries. Herouba had conceded these.

I marched with the Danakils, not one of whom favored me with even a sidelong glance. Herouba rode ahead on the smoothly trotting, well-caparisoned mule that Sinkae had meant for me. Blast his hide! I already felt that we were good friends, but that didn't give him license to smirk at my discomfiture as he trotted to the head of the column!

Sinkae's pack mules brought up the rear, carrying our supplies. I watched their patient plodding over my shoulder and wondered how much distance we would cover before they would be carrying me too!

Relief came when we halted at noon on the outskirts of a scrubby village. My feet were already raw and the climb to the higher reaches of the volcanic region had my heart thumping like a Kafa drum. My head beneath the irksome *ahkouadah* was wet with sweat and spun dizzily as I sank to the parched ground in the scant shade of a stunted eucalyptus tree. I no longer considered myself tough enough to stand up to any man, black or white, as I watched the burly Danakils casually preparing for their noonday meal of peas. It had been just a morning stroll for them!

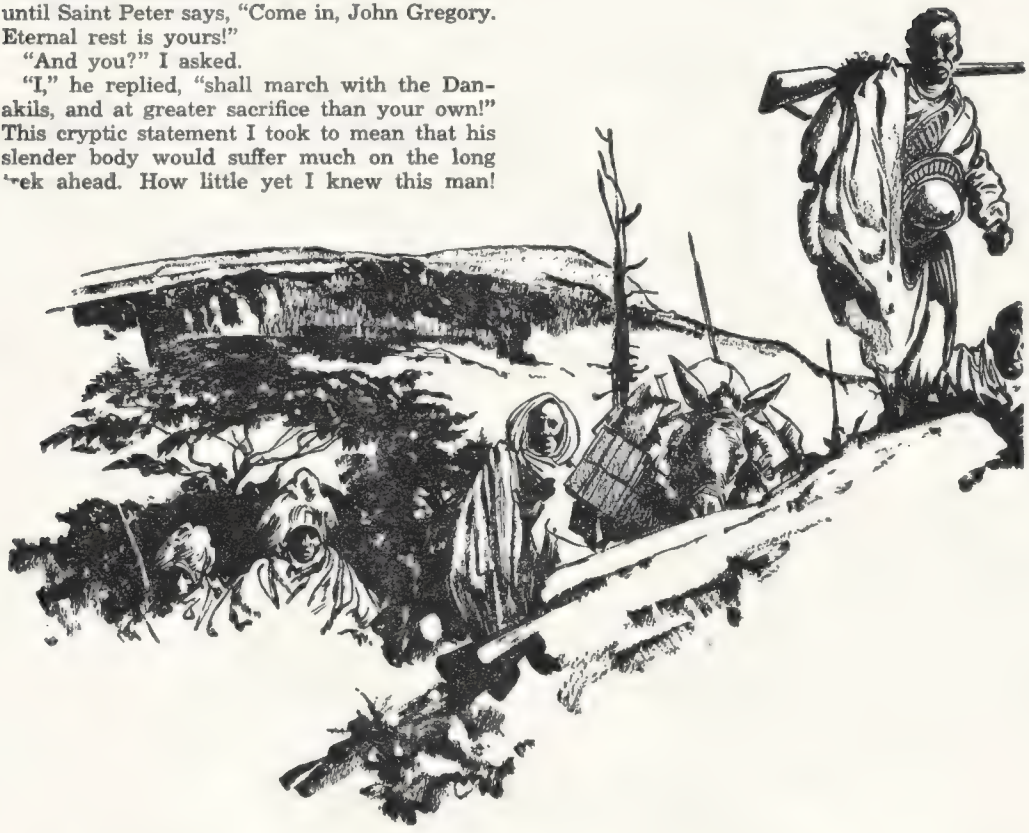
Herouba dismounted and squatted beside me. Gratefully I gulped the gourd of tepid, goat-flavored water he had drawn from one of Sin-

kae's skin bags. He then placed the mule's braided reins in my hand and said, "I believe it will no longer be unsafe for you to ride, *Ferentshi*."

I know that I shall never hear sweeter words until Saint Peter says, "Come in, John Gregory. Eternal rest is yours!"

"And you?" I asked.

"I," he replied, "shall march with the Danakils, and at greater sacrifice than your own!" This cryptic statement I took to mean that his slender body would suffer much on the long trek ahead. How little yet I knew this man!



He rose and strode toward the cluster of grass-thatched *tukuls*. When he returned from the village, a scant half hour later, I understood what he had meant.

I didn't recognize him until he spoke. "It is well that you carry this"—he handed me his cape—"to wear when we approach villages or roving bands; and this"—it was a small umbrella—"to ward off the sun-stroke that is quite common even at this altitude."

I eyed him in astonishment, so much had he changed. Gone was the trim beard that I knew he had prized, and his clean-cut jaw and thin cheeks glistened. This, then, was the sacrifice!

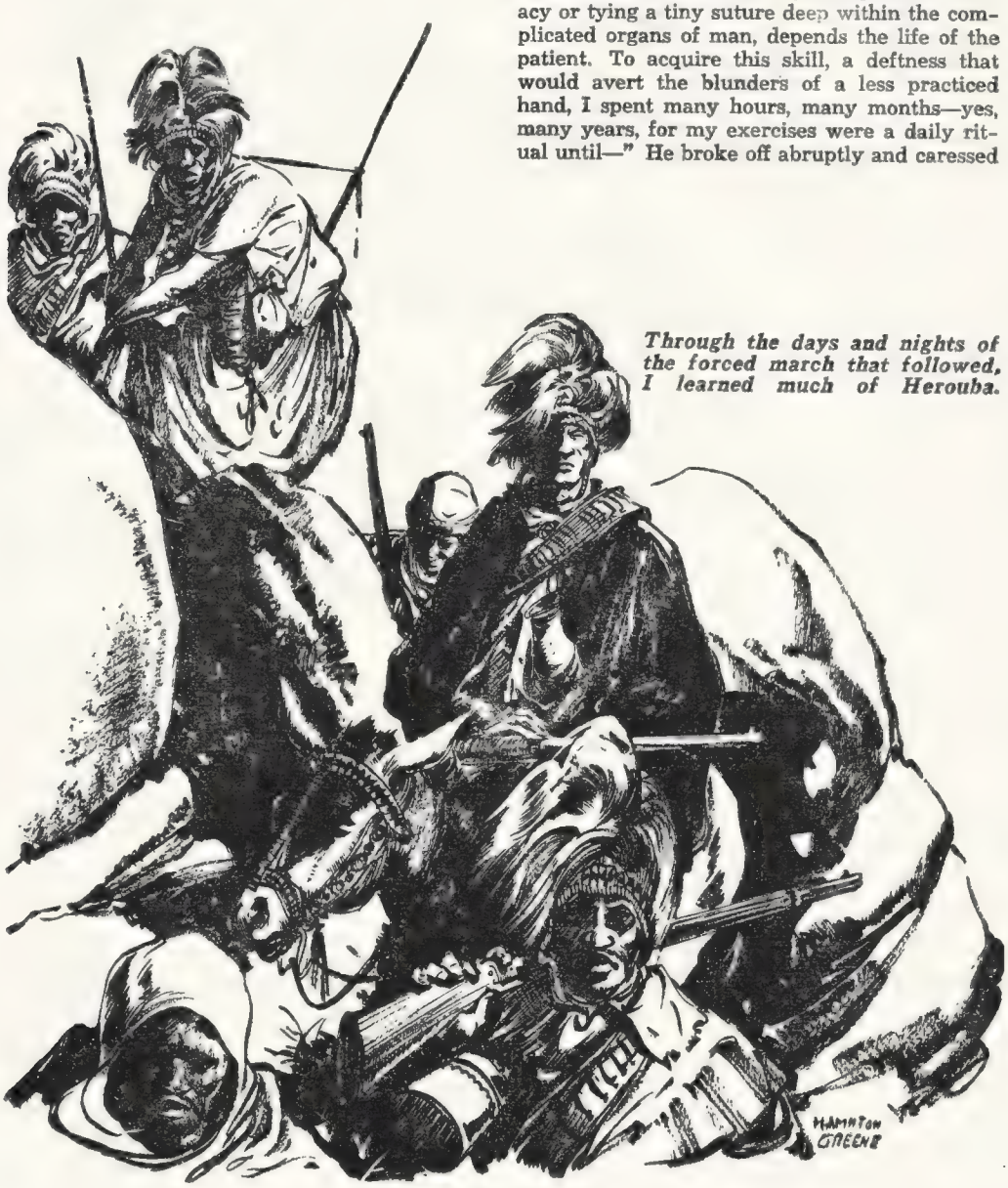
"It is here," he said, "that we leave the main road and take a much less frequented trail. It will mean a longer journey, and through wilder country; but there will be less chance of reports concerning us reaching Mulu Godouy's greedy ears. And I shall be known only to those to whom I make myself known, as the hand of Herouba nears its goal!"

Through the days and nights of the forced march that followed, when Herouba trotted with effortless grace beside my mule, urging us ever to hurry, or squatted with me at the evening halts while the hyenas howled in the distance and lions snuffed and rumbled nearby, I learned much of this intriguing fellow. My admiration and liking increased fast. His wiry body seemed utterly tireless; and as our journey lengthened and the goal neared, his good humor and optimism seemed to grow—a healthy counterbalance for my own rapidly ebbing confidence.

There were some subjects, such as the mysterious powers the hand in the goatskin pouch was supposed to possess, that he carefully evaded; and although the candor of our discourses increased with our acquaintance, I had tact enough to refrain from pressing questions that I felt he would be reluctant to answer. He did, however, speak of his former skill, the digital dexterity that had cost him his hand.

IT WAS at a campfire in the mountains that he volunteered the information. We were huddled in the blankets that the *nagadi* had provided, for the night was bitter cold at that altitude, a terrific contrast to the enervating heat of day. In a large circle around us, the Danakils were preparing their evening meal, the first cooked food in several days, for the meat they had found on the march, whether goat or zebu or gazelle, had been eaten raw. Over their scattered fires pots of *vod* were now boiling, and spread on the stunted bushes were fresh slabs of *intshera* made of grain obtained from a trader whose caravan we had passed that day. Above the monotonous singsong of a tribal chant came the vehement "tshiki-tshik," the vociferous and often meaningless arguments that most Ethiopians seem to relish. The Danakils were happy: only a good battle could make them happier.

"A surgeon's fingers," Herouba was saying, "must be deft and sure. Upon their skill, their sureness and swiftness, in probing with accuracy or tying a tiny suture deep within the complicated organs of man, depends the life of the patient. To acquire this skill, a deftness that would avert the blunders of a less practiced hand, I spent many hours, many months—yes, many years, for my exercises were a daily ritual until—" He broke off abruptly and caressed



Through the days and nights of the forced march that followed, I learned much of Herouba.

again the hideous stump, a gesture that had long since become a habit.

"It was at the college in Vienna," he went on, "that I began this practice, and there came a time when I had become so proficient that I could count the coins in a bystander's pocket without his knowledge. I sometimes irked my fellow students by removing their shirt studs at formal functions, or by substituting disconcerting notes for the papers they handed in at class; but they knew it was all in the spirit of play. I have never," he added, eyeing me evenly, "used that skill for a base purpose."

"You don't need to tell me that, Hakim!"

"After I returned to my home," he continued, "word of my skill soon traveled far. That was why my *ras*—may God alleviate his sufferings now!—assigned to me certain tasks not in the role of surgeon. I never failed him. Even the mission that cost me my hand was consummated before my capture and the article from Ras Mulu Godouy's very person retrieved—a priceless jewel once owned by Solomon the Wise—and placed with my confederate to be returned to my *ras*, the rightful owner. That Mulu Godouy did not then have me slain will prove the costliest mistake he ever made!"

He stared for a while at the glowing coals, then rolled his blanket tightly about him and stretched out beside me. He was soon snoring.

The following evening, high above the main fork of the mountain trail that led to Mulu Godouy's stronghold, the last leg of our journey, we sat long before the campfire going over the plans we had formulated for carrying out our enterprise. The simplicity and directness of the plan evolved seemed to augur well for its success.

It all boiled down to this: Ras Mulu Godouy had a document that I had to have. We realized that attempts to bribe that wily individual would only result in disaster. No mere gold could buy his one big chance to grab an empire! He had already taken measures that had proved his high estimate of that paper's worth.

We could, however, if given opportunities that we meant to arrange, bribe members of his retinue; and Herouba already had some trusted confederates in the *ras's* entourage. I wanted only to gain proximity to the *ras's* strongbox, and this I meant to do if I had to knock over a few custodians myself!

We knew that the *ras* was due in Addis Ababa soon after the *zanaba* with a large portion of his provincial army, to participate in the spring maneuvers which Menelik had scheduled for such of his scattered forces as openly avowed allegiance to the central throne.

"It is well," observed Herouba, "that we shall arrive before his departure for the capital, as he undoubtedly plans to take the document with him. We must not fail, for it would mean—"

He broke off abruptly and sprang to his feet, facing the sentry doing outpost duty a hundred yards down the trail where a violent argument seemed in progress. "Hakim! Hakim Herouba!" came a gasping cry.

Herouba turned to the big Danakil leader and snapped, "Bring him here!"

In a moment the warrior sentry stood before us, grasping in his huge hand most of the tattered *shama* that draped the skinny form of a panting stranger. The captive was unarmed and bore only a long staff, in the cleft end of which was a folded paper, a common device used by native runners.

The stranger bowed to Herouba and extended the stick. Herouba took the paper and squatted by the fire. The look in his eyes when he raised them from the message was not good to see.

"Evil tidings, *Ferentshi*," he said. "Mulu Godouy and his warriors are even now on the march to Addis Ababa, and are due in Mojjo tomorrow!"

I simply groaned. Everything was hay-wire now!

"He is crafty, this Mulu Godouy!" said Herouba. "The maneuvers are not to be held until after the *zanaba*. No other troops, excepting the emperor's guard, will be in the capital until after the roads have again become passable. He will have a month or more to prepare his *coup de maître*, and will attempt to deliver this master stroke whenever he considers the time most favorable for his treachery. We must catch the jackal before he pounces!"

Catch him? With the *ras* riding hell-for-leather to reach Addis Ababa before the *zanaba*, the "short" rains of April—four weeks of steady downpour—bogged down his troops! March now was nearly gone. We had cut it pretty close, ourselves.

Herouba turned to the runner: "How far to Mojjo?"

"I left there at dawn," replied the lean courier. "It is three days' journey by the trail. A good runner"—he straightened proudly—"can do it in a day, over the mountains!"

"Then we will do it in less!" exclaimed Herouba. "We will do it tonight, over the mountains! We will beat the fox to Mojjo and await him there!"

He turned to the big Danakil leader and snapped, "*In hit!*"

That was enough, that simple "We will go!" Even as Herouba turned to me, the tough chieftain was rousing his slumbering warriors and calling in his outpost sentries. There was no grumbling, even though they had slept but little.

"It must be done, *Ferentshi*," said Herouba harshly. "We must pull his teeth at Mojjo. He might be planning to present this document you seek to the representatives of your rival governments as soon as he arrives at the capital. That would indeed be disastrous!"

"It would mean war!" I said dismally. "A three-cornered war with Menelik in the middle and Mulu Godouy licking his chops, waiting for the kill! That treaty of the so-called Third Triumvirate would not be worth the wax on the seals! Just give me a chance at that strongbox of his, that's all I ask!"

I patted my little kit of tools. Herouba eyed me thoughtfully.

"The *ras* always camps at Mojjo when enroute to the capital. I have some friends there who may prove to be very useful. However," he added pointedly, "I doubt if those implements of yours will be needed. The paper you want will more than likely be concealed on the *ras's* person, a more difficult place to explore than any strongbox. I believe you will find the hand of Herouba to be more effective, my friend!"

He stopped fondling the scarred stump and was off to hurry Sinkae with the mules. Already the Danakil vanguard had hit the trail. I mounted and followed.

I SHALL never forget that night. If I ever get to Heaven I want to meet the mule that carried me then. I'll trade my harp for the choicest plot of pasture I can find in Paradise and turn him loose to graze for eternity. He earned it!

As for Herouba, there must be a special hereafter for his kind, where the pluck and stamina, the dynamic force of his spring steel body and driving intellect can find commensurate award!

And those Danakil warriors! How their big bare feet ate up the miles, keeping pace with my fast-loping, sure-footed steed, more often setting the pace themselves; up the trackless mountain side through bushes and over boulders, over and down, headlong through the starlit African night; then along the dried bed of the Awash River's end on the short cut to Mojjo. On this more even stretch I sometimes dozed, waking to the screams of the baboon hordes or hyena packs that often paralleled our course for considerable distance. Now and then a warrior in the vanguard would halt and fire, and answering the blast would come the angry roar of a wounded lion or the snarl of hyenas as they turned upon their fallen member.

We halted on the outskirts of Mojjo as the sun came over the purple mountains now behind us. The Danakils dropped in their tracks and seemed to be soon asleep. Herouba went on into the town.

I found a small water-hole and drank deeply, and to hell with malaria! I watered the mule, gave him some *teff* from the saddle-bags, tied the reins around my ankle and was sleeping soundly when Herouba shook me fiercely.

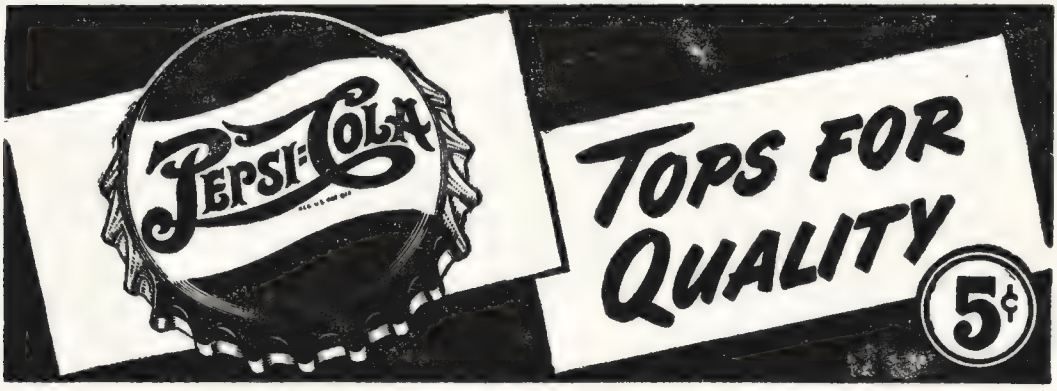
"Mulu Godouy passed in the night!" he said grimly. "Only his horsemen were with him. The foot soldiers are two days behind. This means that our rests must be very brief if we overtake him before he reaches Addis Ababa. It is three days' march, but he will very likely do it in two. We must do it in less!"

And we had already outdistanced Sinkae Gabri. His pack mules were nowhere in sight. A dozen of the Danakils had stayed with him as guard, but that didn't allay my concern over the valuables I had stored in the goatskin sacks!

I said that I would have to wait for Sinkae to catch up, but Herouba was adamant in his refusal to delay further the race to Addis Ababa.

"Unless we succeed," he said flatly, "your money will avail you nothing—nor me, either! Have no fear; I have arranged for proper care of your possessions until such time as you may need them. Our only concern now is speed. There may be no need of bribery. When we reach Mulu Godouy, we will have to adjust the circumstances to meet the moment. I have a plan, and you must trust me!"

So on to Addis Ababa, through a headlong nightmare in which the pangs of hunger and the tortures of thirst were only deadened by the pall of utter fatigue. Man alive, don't ever



tell *me* that Ethiopians, whether you mean aristocrats or hinterland warriors, are an indolent race! After nearly forty years, I still sometimes wake with aching bones when I dream of that ride! And that skinny Herouba and the stalwart Danakils did it all on their calloused soles, through the glaring sunlight and the chilly black night; he often slapping the rump of my mule to urge him to greater speed, and they sometimes singing their weird tribal chants as they swung along!

And we lost the race—by a nose! Ras Mulu Godouy's cavalrymen were cantering into the eucalyptus-bordered streets of the city when we came into view of the Gibbi, the emperor's palace crowning the hill overlooking the sprawling collection of sheet-iron shacks and thatched mud huts. We crossed a ravine called the Hyena Pit and entered the outskirts. I slid off my mule at the door of a nondescript mud *tukul* and slumped to the ground.

Herouba gave a quick order to the big Danakil chief and the warriors vanished with hardly a word, gliding out of sight in the cluster of huts like quails in a covert. I never saw them again. It was many days later that I learned how I had paid them.

With the help of a native he summoned from the doorway, Herouba dragged me into the hut. I felt like hell. I was more than fagged out in body, spirit and mind. The foul water I had drunk whenever I could find it, the dried peas I had chewed and gulped, and the unripe bananas I had grabbed and bolted on the road from Mojjo, hadn't helped me any.

I wanted only to die. Herouba wouldn't let me. He stretched me out on a pallet of hides, then held a gourd to my lips while I drank a tepid, foul-smelling concoction that tasted even worse.

"I, too, shall sleep a short while," he said. Only his haggard eyes told of the rigors he had endured. "We will need more strength for the thing we soon must do!"

CHAPTER IV

THE MESSAGE THAT WASN'T SENT

WHATEVER that vile brew was, it must have had some medicinal merit, for when Herouba woke me several hours later I felt as though I actually wanted to live. I was stiff and sore, but my head had cleared and the peppery pot of *vod* on the fire set my nostrils twitching. "I have been out while you slept," said Herouba, "and brought back an acquaintance of yours!"

I sat bolt upright at this. It was Karu, the fat Somali, Herouba's erstwhile psuedo-creditor! Only he didn't look mean and piggish now. He grinned bashfully in response to my "*Inde-mindi-nu*, Karu!"—and when I held out my hand in greeting, he began filling it with Maria Theresa thalers from his camel-bladder purse!

"No, no!" I protested, and laughed for the first time in several days. "Hakim Herouba is not for sale this time!" I poured the coins back into his purse and he and Herouba joined in the laughter. It was just the anodyne we needed for the agony we had endured, and a tonic to prepare us for the task ahead.

"Good laughter," observed Herouba sagely, "is a God-given panacea. It will enable you better to endure the bad news we bring, and all the more to enjoy the good!"

"Bad news?" I echoed, then demanded, "Well, let's have it! Are we too late?"

"No, *Ferentshi*," smiled Herouba. "We have yet time to accomplish the purpose of your mission. But that is the good news! You wanted the bad news first, so here it is." He drew one deep breath and went on: "The *ras* offers a thousand silver thalers for you, my friend, dead or alive! Thus far, I believe we have been successful in concealing your identity; nor does anyone but we three know of your presence here."

"Well," I managed to grin, "I have had higher prices on my head, and less reason to risk it!" But gooseflesh tightened my skin as I thought of Jacques and Carter. I had gambled with my life before, when the stakes were high, but thoughts of the sort of death that Mulu Godouy could dish out had my courage at low ebb. I hoped Herouba didn't sense it as I added, "Just get me into the *ras's* quarters; that is all I ask, and leave the rest to me!"

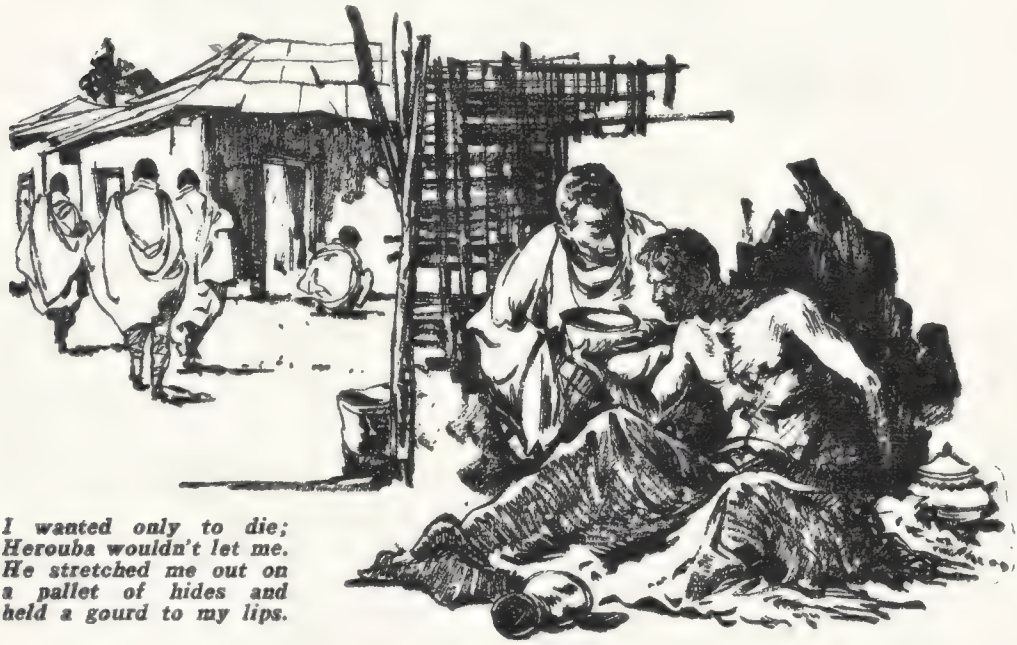
Herouba shook his head. "We cannot risk it!" he said emphatically. "Should you be detected, our plans would fail utterly. Not only would your life be forfeit; safeguards of the document we seek would be redoubled. No, *Ferentshi*, the circumstances permit only the hand of Herouba to act as retriever. The magic you have long awaited, and probably doubted, will prove its merit before this day's sun has set!"

His eyes blazed as he clutched the goatskin pouch at his breast. I knew it was useless to protest; worse than useless now to express any doubt concerning the magic that withered claw was alleged to possess.

"Ras Mulu Godouy," Herouba continued, "has an appointment at mid-afternoon with the minister representing one of the countries your employers are loath to offend. The minister of the other government will also be present. That it is the *ras's* purpose then to present the document, I am convinced. Before that hour, it is my purpose to have that document in my own possession. You can help me most, my friend, by staying in concealment here!"

"Which legation?" I asked. He told me, and then added, "I may be unable to see you again, but you may rest assured that in the event of my inability to deliver the document to you, I will destroy it, and you shall receive proof of its destruction! Thus will the ends of your government be served, and my own country's peril be averted. Failing my return, I shall, if possible, send you a message tonight. Obey its instructions implicitly. Your life will depend upon it!"

Without any melodramatic good-byes, he and Karu were gone. I was glad that it was so. Any attempts to express my feelings would only have lent embarrassment to a high-keyed situation. But his going left me with a very real sense of loss, a depressing feeling that he was going to his doom!

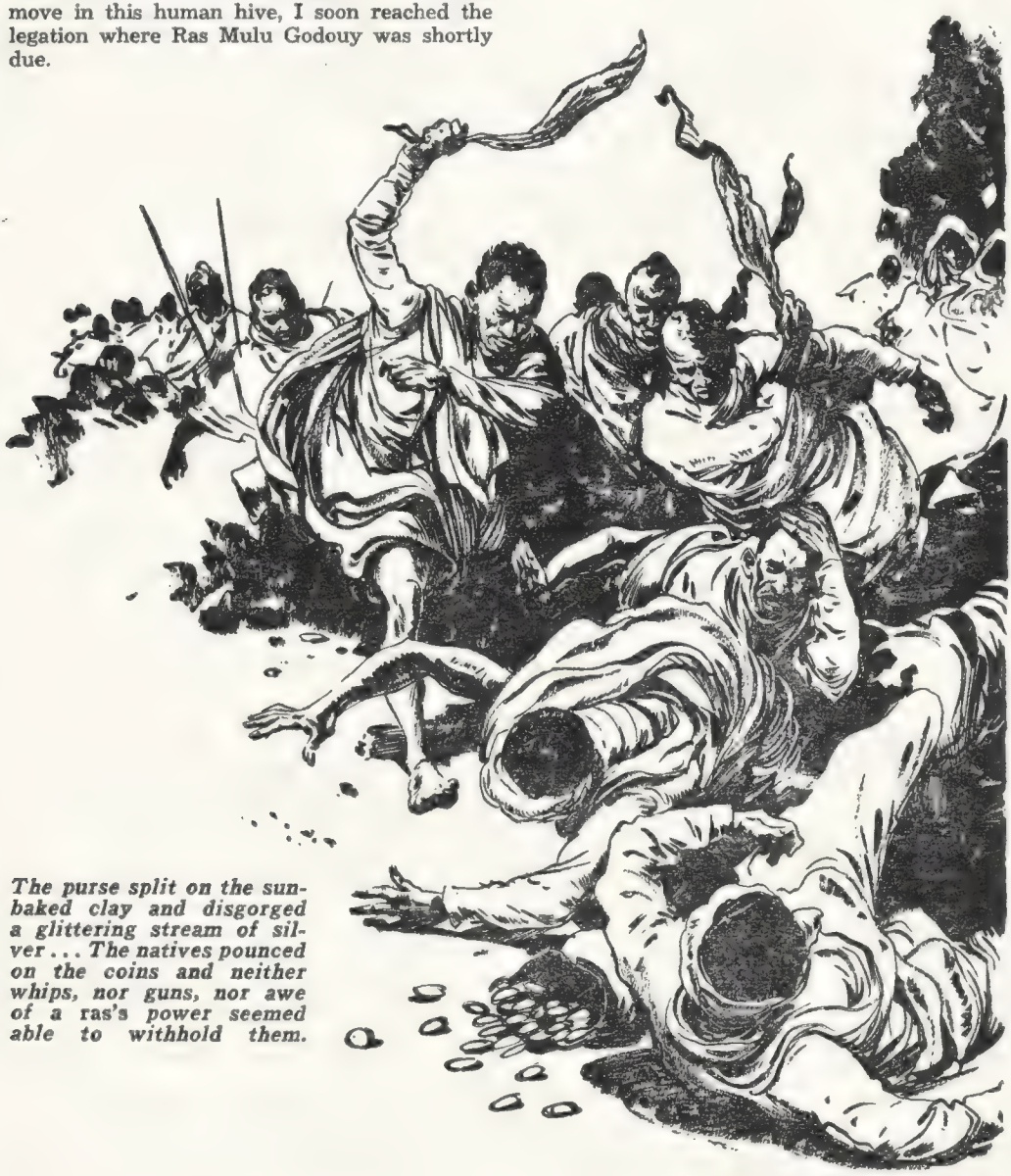


I wanted only to die; Herouba wouldn't let me. He stretched me out on a pallet of hides and held a gourd to my lips.

I couldn't stand the waiting. The savory stew that the genial Amhara's wife set before me at noon, I scarcely touched; and shortly after the sun had passed its zenith, I slipped my Colt from its holster, saw that it was in working order with the cylinder fully loaded, and strode from the *tukul*.

I went down Makonnen Allee and crossed Menelik Square without incident. Mingling with the crowds that seemed always to be on the move in this human hive, I soon reached the legation where Ras Mulu Godouy was shortly due.

I had no definite plans. I was guided only by the instinct, the hunches, call them what you will, that had kept me alive in other tight corners. However, one thing I had determined to do. If the *ras* appeared, it would mean that Herouba had failed; for disappearance of the document would surely postpone the appointment.



The purse split on the sun-baked clay and disgorged a glittering stream of silver . . . The natives pounced on the coins and neither whips, nor guns, nor awe of a ras's power seemed able to withhold them.

In that event, I had but one last bolt in my quiver: to kill Mulu Godouy before he could bait the trap that might easily ensnare three already diplomatically sparring nations—and this I meant to do!

Bordering the road opposite the legation's squat stone and concrete structure, was a thicket of eucalyptus choked with an undergrowth of thorny shrubs. Into this barbed covert I crawled and waited, gun in hand, scarcely twenty paces from the legation's gate.

The wait seemed interminable, but it must have been less than an hour before the advance guard of Mulu Godouy's entourage appeared, poking with their rifles and lashing with their hippo-hide whips all who did not quickly clear the road.

THE *ras* cantered up on a richly caparisoned white Arabian which reared to a halt at the legation gate. I paid no heed to the hundred or more mounted warriors behind him as I squinted at the hawk-like face of the *ras* over the sights of my Colt. But even as my finger tightened on the trigger, I lost my one good chance for a perfect shot, for breaking from the cluster of natives crowding the legation gate, and directly in my line of vision, there sprang a familiar figure. Herouba!

Things happened so fast during the next brief moments that I have never yet been able to reconstruct a clear mental picture of the action, and the maelstrom of yelling natives and flailing warriors soon obscured my view.

The *ras* had dismounted, but his left foot was still in the stirrup when Herouba leaped toward him. A bulging bladder purse was held high in Herouba's hand and he was shouting above the clamor, "A gift for Your Excellency!"

Now I knew he was completely crazy, but thoughts of his utter madness were drowned in dismay as I saw him stumble and fall headlong at the *ras's* feet. The purse split on the sun-baked clay and disgorged a glittering stream of silver coins. Like hungry urchins at an upset apple-cart, the natives pounced for the coins, and neither whips nor guns nor awe of a *ras's* power seemed able to withhold them. Many were cruelly beaten, but the bloodiest of all seemed Herouba when the *ras* stood again closely guarded by his warriors.

I had more reason than ever to shoot now, but my target was completely eclipsed by the closely packed guard as Mulu Godouy entered the gate and hurried to the legation door, leaving Herouba's prostrate form to be further kicked and beaten by the enraged warriors outside.

I believed him surely to be dead, but even as the crowd receded clutching the coins so hardly earned, I saw Herouba roll away from the warriors' merciless blows. Seemingly all in one motion, he gained his feet, crouched and ran. With his gory left arm hugging his bruised belly, he quickly merged with the fast retreating crowd and was gone from sight.

The bottom had dropped out of everything when I retraced my steps to the Amhara's *tukul* where Herouba and I had parted. The only alleviating thought was that he was still alive, by the grace of what I didn't know. Perhaps, as he had said, the *ras* considered him harmless now. But at any rate, it was now too late for him, or for me, to spike the *ras's* guns. My mission had failed utterly!

I was trying to coordinate my thoughts and plan a way of getting out of this hell-hole of creation with an unpunctured hide when my problem was solved in a single terse sentence written with charcoal on a torn bit of bladder!

Karu, the fat Somali, had entered the *tukul* with a puma-like tread that seemed impossible for one of his build. When I looked up from my bowl of *vod,* he handed me the message without a word. It looked like a piece of the purse that had burst at Mulu Godouy's feet. It simply said: *Do exactly as Karu says!*

"Well," I said, "it looks like I am in your hands." I was too far gone even to think of any objections.

"We leave tonight for Fitche, three days' journey to the north," he said. "There I will arrange for you to accompany a slave trader's caravan back to the coast where you landed, and where it is understood you have certain friends."

Back to the coast! Then across to Arabia. Back to Aden to cable report of my failure! Back, back, O Lord! how many miles, how many years, back to my good old American birthplace that I fervently swore I would never leave again!

"The journey to the coast," said Karu, "will take many days, and it will not be easy; but it is the only arrangement that offers you any measure of safety."

I nodded in grim agreement. "And Herouba," I asked, "what of him?"

"He will recover," the Somali replied. "Beyond that, I cannot discuss Hakim Herouba's plans. They will be of his own making. For me, it is but to obey."

There is but little merit in prolonged description of the journey to the Red Sea. Let it be sufficient to say that Karu's statement of its difficulties proved to be grossly understated. It was awful. If there are other white men who have trekked more than five hundred miles with an Arab slave dealer's train of human and sub-human freight, through brain-baking heat and blinding sandstorm, they can understand me, but they alone!

Karu bade me farewell at Fitche on the third day. I gave him a message for Herouba and an address in Aden where I could be reached if I ever arrived on the Asiatic shore. When I expressed my sorrow at being unable to pay him, the Somali simply smiled and pressed into my hand a small wad of *millefranc* notes!

"You will have need of these," he said, and abruptly left me before my astonishment would allow me to thank him. As I stared at the notes, a small amount compared to the wealth I had left behind in Sinkae Gabri's goatskin bags but surely a fortune to this humble native, I wondered anew at the strangeness of these odd people and how apt I had been to let appearances warp my judgment of them.

It was in the quarters of Ben Youseff, a Levantine friend, in the blistering port of Aden, that this tale of my attempt to nip an international conflict in the borning had its denouement. Africa and the nauseous sail back through the Straits of Bab el Mandeb in the

stinking Arab *dshounka* were behind me. There was only the steaming silver urn of Harari coffee on the table before me to bring memories of the turbulent country from which it came. The furnishings of the room were a pleasant mixture of exotic Asiatic culture and European comfort, welcome contrast to the mud *tukuls* I had left behind.

I WAS trying to compose a cable to the great statesman who had sent me on this journey and had prayed for my success. It was not an easy task, but it had to be done. I winced inwardly as I envisioned the pall of gloom my message would bring to a man who had trusted me and paid me well. I had torn up several redundant explanations of why I had failed, finally penned a succinct "Failed completely" and grabbed my sun helmet to rush to the cable office.

That message was never sent, thanks to the Providence that must watch over dolts like me —and nations, too!

Ben Youseff met me at the door of my room. "Two strangers beg permission to see you," he announced. "Ethiopians, I believe."

Ethiopians! Even as I was wondering if Ras Mulu Godouy's thousand silver thalers might be their motive, they stepped before me—Sinkae Gabri first, and then Herouba!

"Dinastlin, Ato Gregory!" *"Dinastlin, Ferentshi!"* Their greetings were music to my ears, and their wide gleaming grins a heart-warming sight. I knew that most Ethiopians are averse to personal contact in demonstrations of affection, but I just couldn't help it—I hugged them both, and they didn't seem to resent it!

I propelled them into my room, unable to speak for a moment. Then: "Tell me," I demanded, "are you now fugitives, too?"

Herouba laughed. "Quite the contrary, my friend," he replied. "We now stand high in the emperor's favor. Could one ask more than that?"

I sat down weakly and motioned them to seats on the tapestried divan.

"I am only going to listen," I said, "but you must tell me quickly before I burst. Now, let's have it!"

"First," said Herouba with maddening deliberation, "I should like to square our accounts. I have spent much, but I am confident that you will find the cost was justified."

From beneath his *shama* he drew a belt and held it toward me. It was my money belt! "You will find it all there," he said, "with the exception of the amounts I had to use to cover the expenditures I have listed here."

He unfolded a sheet of paper and handed it to me. The first item listed was, *Forty-eight Mannlicher rifles, four thousand and eight hundred thalers,* and the next was, *Four thousand and eight hundred cartridges at one temun each, three hundred thalers.*

Karu, the fat Somali

"What for?" I asked. "Or don't tell me, if you'd rather not."

"Of course you may know," he answered promptly. "It was your money I spent! Those items paid for your Danakil guard. With the emperor's permission, I bought them from the Armenian munitions trader in Addis Ababa. Each member of your guard now owns a fine rifle and a hundred rounds of ammunition for it, and each considers himself the luckiest and now most formidable warrior in all Ethiopia!"

Five thousand one hundred thalers. About seventeen hundred dollars American then. Well, that Danakil guard was certainly worth it!

The third item was, *One hundred thalers in small silver for the crowd.*

"The purse you were presenting to the *ras*?" I asked.

"Presenting to the bystanders," he corrected with a grin. "Not a bad investment, when one considers the distraction it bought!"

The fourth item puzzled me even more: *Four hundred thalers to the warriors who beat me.*

"It was necessary," explained Herouba quietly. "Had they not been hired by me to deal the terrible blows the *ras* thought I received, I would have been beaten by others—and I might not have survived! Even with this precaution, one of the other warriors speared my arm. It seemed not too great a price to pay, and I paid it in advance of the *ras's* visit to the legation."

I could only say "Good Lord!" and hand him back the list, after noting that the remaining items carried but trivial amounts.

"Please keep it, *Ferentshi*," he said, "and after you are satisfied with the service rendered, you may pay me what you consider it to be worth."

"My life?" I asked, as I recalled our conversation at our first meeting in Dire Daoua. I knew that it was only through his efforts that I had not shared the fate of Jacques and Carter, and my gratitude knew no bounds.

"That," he replied gravely, "was a matter of friendship. There can be no payment for such as that! But perhaps the other service, for which you hired me, might merit some reward. Have you forgotten the hand of Herouba?"

In a moment I had the document unrolled in my trembling fingers . . . Only a piece of paper, but it could have changed the map of Africa!

My heart nearly parted my hair as my mind flashed back to his recent statement: "High in the emperor's favor"!

"For God's sake!" I whispered hoarsely. "Did you actually get it, Herouba?"

He smiled and held out his arm. "Take it, *Ferentshi*," he told me. "I regret that I could not deliver it sooner, but it was thought best that you did not travel in our country with it on your person. I am sorry if I have caused you unnecessary worry!"

The hand was empty. Suspended from his

wrist by a stout thong was a thick, two-foot quirt of braided green and red leather tipped with a lion's mane "fly chaser," a customary part of all aristocratic Ethiopians' equipment.

I gaped in perplexity until he gestured again. "Take it, my friend," he repeated. "You will find that which you sought rolled within the braids!"

I slipped the thong from his wrist and tried to unbraid the quirt, but my hands shook so that Sinkae Gabri took it from me, opened his clasp-knife and snicked off the lion's mane tip, freeing the tightly woven strands.

In a moment I had the document unrolled in my trembling fingers—the damning contract that carried Ras Mulu Godouy's heavy Amharic scrawl, the flowing signature of a blundering diplomat, and the seals of the government that wanted this paper so much. Only a piece of paper, but it could easily have changed the map of Africa!

I FOLDED the paper and placed it in my pocket to be later sewed in the lining of my jacket; then I placed the money belt over Herouba's arm. "I am sorry, Hakim," I said earnestly, "that it is not ten times this amount. Less the small amounts you spent, there is a quarter of a million francs there. I was to spend it all if necessary. I consider that it was necessary!"

I was certain that a grateful government official would allow that item on my expense account, but I just didn't give a damn right then!

"Now please," I begged, "tell me how you did it, and I will never again doubt your ability to perform miracles!"

"It was no miracle," he replied. "In fact, it was a task hardly worthy of the hand of Herouba. Its execution was simple, once I had learned where the document was hidden. The *ras* carried it, together with other papers I thought the emperor should know about, in a soft leather case wrapped in the folds of his sash. To procure it was not difficult when we were rolling on the ground in the melee that followed the bursting of my purse!"

"Clever planning, that!" I exclaimed admiringly. "Go on!"

"The *ras* is wise," continued Herouba, "but his is the wisdom of a jackal, and there was one thing he did not know, nor did the butcher who carried out his orders. That one bit of ignorance proved his undoing!"

I waited impatiently for his explanation of the withered hand's magic that I was sure would be forthcoming now.

Herouba held up his left hand and flexed its supple digits. "The *ras* did not know," he said slowly, "that I am *left-handed*. It was this hand I had trained so painstakingly!"

I burst out with, "Well, I'll be damned! And the hand in the pouch meant nothing, then?" I had noticed that he was no longer wearing the goatskin pouch.

"Oh yes!" he replied with a grin. "It served a very useful purpose—as a 'red herring,' I believe the English call it! And it kept the *ras's* spies believing the amputation had rendered me crazy and therefore doubly harmless. Surely, no demented cripple could effect much harm!"

"But," I said, "you were mighty lucky the *ras* didn't discover his loss before he entered the legation."

"I had provided for that," he explained, "by substituting a similar case that I carried for the purpose." He laughed aloud. "I would like to have seen the *ras's* face when he presented the contents of that case to the two European ministers!"

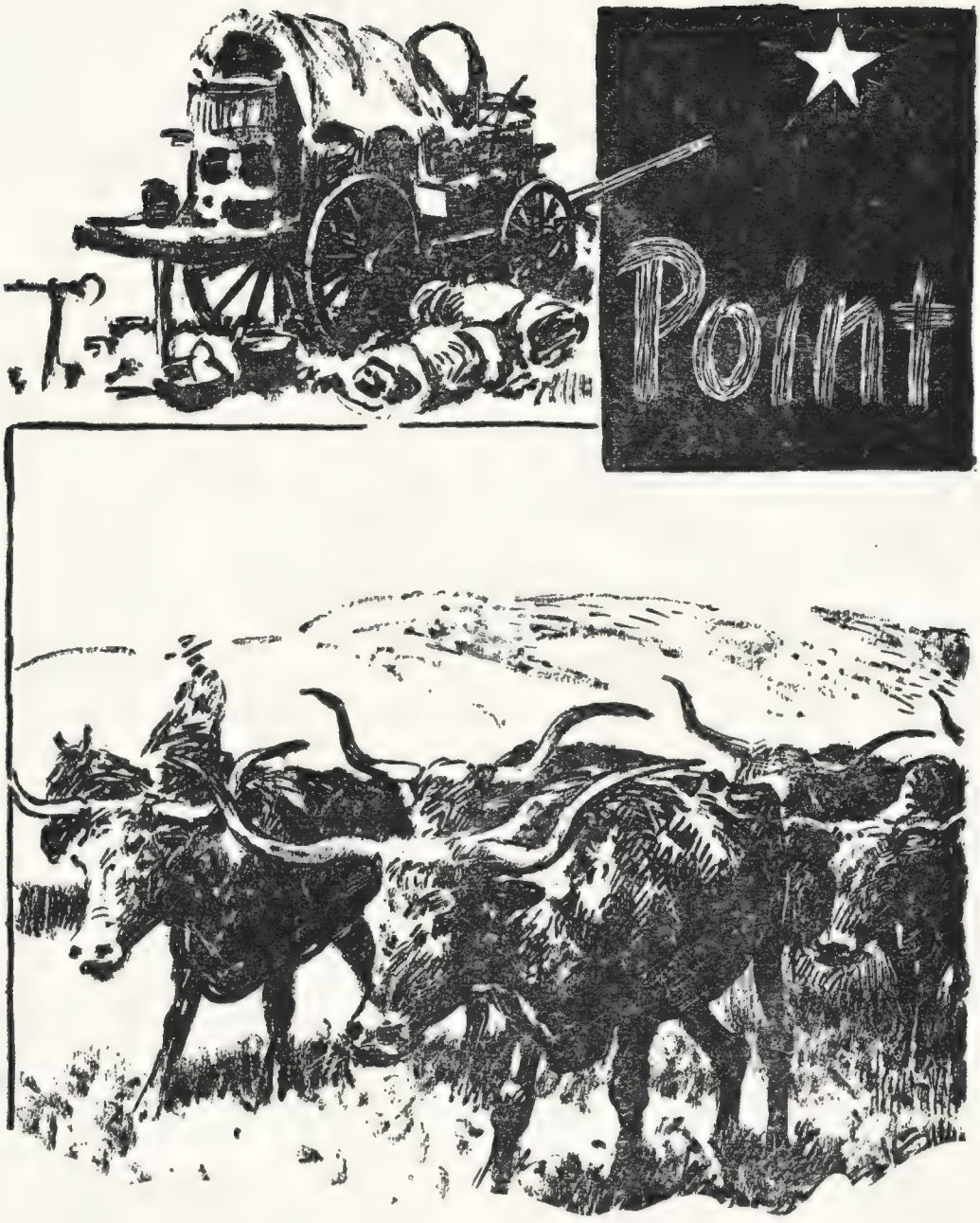
"You mentioned 'other papers,' " I said. "Papers the emperor should know about. Did you get them, too?"

He nodded and smiled. "The drafts of Ras Mulu Godouy's agreements with these other two nations! He was playing them each against the other, and both against the third, with an empire at stake. I was not long getting an audience with the emperor, after an *ami de court* in the Gibbi gave him an inkling of what I had to give him. Menelik immediately summoned the *ras*, had him placed in chains and sent under heavy guard to the fortress at Harar by an unfrequented route. The wise old emperor kept the *ras's* personal escort under guard in the Gibbi until it was too late for his troops to accomplish anything in an attempt at rescue."

"Well," I said, "at least the *ras* will pay in part for what he did to you!"

"Ras Mulu Godouy will have many solitary hours in which to regret that mistake, and to rue the greed that prompted his rash attempt to steal an empire—unless," he added with evident enjoyment, "the emperor determines sooner that the *ras* has lived long enough!"

Well, as history shows, the *ras* did live long, chained in his dungeon cell deep in the strong Harari fortress; and I am sure that every day and every night of it, he fervently cursed the hand of Herouba!



The Bar Nines trailed steadily toward the North Star, driving through rain and shine.

ILLUSTRATED BY NICK EGGENHOFER

THOSE first three days north from the Cibolo were fashioned of dust and dreams, of stumbling weariness and a feeling of wild, delicious freedom, and—closest of all to Johnnie Barton—the exciting knowledge that he was a man grown. But he kept looking back over his shoulder, hoping that his mother would resign herself to the

for a Star

By ALLAN R. BOSWORTH

fact of his maturity. Maybe it wasn't kind to write a note and leave while she was away, but the cattle couldn't wait. And all along, he told himself, she had known that some day he would go up the Trail . . .

His place was in the drag, behind two thousand head of longhorns not yet settled into the routine of the drive; he wore out two and three horses a day, and shouted his lungs raw, keeping the stragglers out of the brush. And later, when the herd was bedded down to the night riders' soft singing, and stars burned like a million campfires down the dark prairies of the sky, he lay listening to cowboy yarns and watching Big Jim Ketchum until he fell asleep.

And Big Jim was a man for watching. Cy

Bradley owned the Bar Nine trail herd; Cy was bossing the crew of sixteen riders and a cook up the long trail from Texas, and folks said he was worth more money than you could haul off with a span of mules. But he was a little, dried-up kind of a man with worries between his eyes, and nothing much to say—you couldn't compare him with Big Jim Ketchum. Maybe Big Jim was just a forty-dollar cowboy, but he was far and away the best rider and roper in the outfit. He had a quick, white-toothed smile, and devils danced in his black eyes. Wherever he jingled his spurs, the recklessness seemed to spill out of him like bright laughter.

Everybody along the Cibolo had heard about Big Jim's killing a couple of men up in Kansas, on the last drive. Johnnie Barton asked the cook about this, on his first day.

"Yeah," the cook said, "but there wasn't much to it. They just picked on the wrong man, that's all. Big Jim ain't afraid of anything that walks, crawls, or flies—and I've seen him shoot the spots out of a playin' card at thirty feet." He gave the dishpan a final swipe, and hung it under the chuckbox. Then he lowered his voice. "They say Sam Bass invited Big Jim to join up with him."

Johnnie whistled. Everybody knew about Sam Bass, too, robbing trains right and left, and giving most of the money—so the stories said—to poor folks. There was a song made up about him.

"What happened?" Johnnie asked. "After the shooting, I mean. Was Big Jim arrested?"

"Wasn't no call for him to be arrested," the cook said sharply. "It was self-defense. You don't want to get the idee that Big Jim's an outlaw, because he ain't—not yet, anyway. He just don't let nobody crowd him, that's all!"

AT THE start of the drive, while they were in the brush country, Johnnie seldom saw Big Jim except by firelight. For that matter, he saw little enough of the drive's far-flung pageantry—the dust took care of that. The dust rolled back over him in a billowing, choking cloud, burning his eyes, forcing him to wear his bandanna high over nose and mouth so he could breathe. Beyond the dust, he heard the wild, confused clamor of the cattle, the yells and quirt slaps of riders along the flank and swing.

It was enough to know that all of it was up there like drama behind a curtain: The mile-long stream of red and dun steers winding through the brush with their horns catching the sunlight, Bart Seely driving the extra horses of the remuda, the chuck wagon bumping along to the next bed grounds, and Cy Bradley keeping a jealous eye on everything. Big Jim Ketchum was up there, riding his pick of the saddle stock, laughing and singing while he did the work of two men.

You could tell that Big Jim had a heart the size of a watermelon. He teased the new hand a little, of course, and laughed, and once or twice called him "Johnnie-Come-Lately." But there was nothing he didn't know about trailing cattle, and he shared that knowledge. It was Big Jim who showed Johnnie how the wagon tongue was always pointed for the North Star at night, so that even in the plains country, where everything looked alike, the outfit would not get far off its course. He explained, too, that trail work would become easier after a few days, when each steer fell into an accustomed place in the line of march.

"Ride up here with me, and I'll show you something," he told the boy that third evening, when the Bar Nines made camp early because water was handy. And he led the way toward the point of the herd as it halted and spread, grazing, in a little valley. "You see that big mulberry-colored five-year-old—a *moro,* the Mexicans call him?"

Johnnie nodded. The steer's unusual color was not his only outstanding characteristic. He had a six-foot spread of horns that looked as hard as polished steel, and a big-boned, high-shouldered frame, and his eyes were wide apart. While they watched, he moved away from the rest of the herd, traveling with a lumbering gait that somehow still embodied a wild and natural grace.

Big Jim chuckled as he made a cigarette. "Already figures the others ain't in his class!" he said. "I been watching him. He steps out like a streak of blue lightning. That steer will lead this herd across the Red River, and the Arkansas, and right into the shipping pens at Dodge! What do you think we ought to name him?"

"Why," said Johnnie, flattered, "how about Lightning?"

"You've hit it, kid!" exclaimed Big Jim, slapping his knee. "Lightning it is. We'll put a bell on him tomorrow."

Then he looked up, frowning. There came Cy Bradley out from the chuck wagon, putting his horse into a lope through the mesquites, and reining in short as he reached them.

"Johnnie," said the owner of the Bar Nines, "we got a visitor in camp. Your mother." He spat, and rested his forearms on the saddlehorn as he studied the boy. The worried creases deepened between his eyes. He said, "Did you run away, son?"

"No, sir!" Johnnie denied quickly. He felt Big Jim Ketchum's eyes, half-amused, half-challenging. "Anyway, I don't call it that. Ma wasn't home, but I left her a note. I reckon it's just kind of hard for her to remember that I'm sixteen years old!"

"Sixteen?" laughed Big Jim. "I never really had a mother, kid, but I can tell you some-

thing. It's the same, whether you're twelve or thirty, the first time you go." He took a drag from his cigarette, and grinned at Johnnie. "Don't let it throw you, cowboy," he said.

Johnnie shook his head. "I don't aim to. Since Pa died, I'm the man of the house, and I can work where I want. I ain't going back!"

"Well," said Cy Bradley, "she rode thirty miles sidesaddle to catch up with us. You better come in and talk things over—if I have to hire another hand, I want to know. You, too, Jim."

"Not me," said Big Jim. "I never was much of a hand in family arguments. Besides, this case is up to the kid."

Cy Bradley squinted curiously at his top hand. "You come on into camp," he said. "Mrs. Barton asked about you."

IT WAS strange, Johnnie thought later; it was something he couldn't quite figure out. He went rebelliously toward the wagon, his cheeks burning with embarrassment. Bart Seely, leading a pair of horses out to the rope corral, grinned at him, and said, "Hey, kid—save me a pair of apron strings for hobbles!" And Big Jim Ketchum leaned from his saddle and told Bart to keep his mouth shut.

The wrangler was a new man. "Maybe you'd like to try shuttin' it for me!" he retorted.

"I can do that, too," Big Jim said quietly. "When there's not a lady around."

He rode on with Johnnie and Cy Bradley, and the incident added to Johnnie's feeling of disgrace. Big Jim didn't figure he was man enough to take his own part. *That's because Ma had to come traipsing after me!* he thought resentfully. *I won't ever live that down. And if she cries and takes on . . .*

But that was the strange part of it. His mother didn't cry. She sat on a bedding roll—a spare, tired-looking woman, wearing a blue calico dress and a faded sunbonnet, and one of his father's old coats. She drank coffee while the campfire gleamed boldly on the tin cup and touched the angles of her face with quick little fingers of light. And all she said to Johnnie was, "Well . . . do you like it, son?"

He gulped. "It's—it's wonderful!"

Cy Bradley and Big Jim came in from the picket line, taking off their hats. Cy said, "We'll have supper right soon, ma'am." He motioned Big Jim around the fire. "Make you acquainted with Jim Ketchum, Mrs. Barton."

"Howdy, ma'am," said Big Jim, and there was that quick, charming smile. "The kid's getting along just fine!"

"You're all he talked about," Mrs. Barton said wonderingly. She was studying Big Jim, and her voice sounded tired, and far away from her thoughts. She said, "I was down at Aunt Emmy's when he left, and I kind of hated for him to go that way. He's all I got, now."

She put down the cup, and her face was in the shadow of the sunbonnet, and Johnnie Barton could only guess at her eyes. The dusk thickened. A restless, scattered complaint came from the cattle, and Curly McGee, riding slowly around the near side of the bed grounds, began singing. It was a lonesome sound, and wind stirred in the mesquites and moved lonesomely with it. But the camp was cheerful with the shine of firelight on the wagon tarp, and the homely, appetizing smells of boiling coffee and hot bread baking under the coals that covered the skillet lid. Johnnie drew a deep breath. It would be like this all the way up the Trail.

Cy Bradley sat down to wait supper, awkward and more silent than ever in the presence of a woman. But Big Jim Ketchum acted like Mrs. Barton was his own mother. He brought her a box to use for a table, and put another bed roll at her back, and joshed the cook about having misplaced the napkins.

"Now, you just make yourself right at home!" he told her. "It ain't often we have a lady for a guest. And if you been worrying about the kid, ma'am, just don't do it any more. I aim to make a top hand out of him, and I'll see that he don't tangle with any pitching horses, or wild Indians!"

He winked at Johnnie, and laughed again. Mrs. Barton smiled. The boy could see her uneasiness vanishing like the smoke from the campfire.

"I feel a lot better about it, already," she said. "It makes a big difference, knowing the men he'll be working with."

Cy Bradley cleared his throat. This was his outfit, and he was Johnnie's boss; he thought he ought to say something.

"I reckon that's right," he began. "We've got a good bunch. Oh, like any trail outfit, they work hard, and it's a long, dry drive—and, well, some of the boys blow off a little steam now and then. But"—he hesitated awkwardly, looking at Big Jim—"ain't none of 'em as bad as folks might think."

The cook called supper, then. When it was over, Curly McGee came in from night herd and played his fiddle, and Big Jim sang—*there ain't anything Big Jim can't do!* Johnnie thought. Later, he fixed a bed in the wagon for Mrs. Barton. Camp would be broken at daylight; she'd have a long ride back to the Cibolo.

"You asleep, kid?" Big Jim called softly from his bed roll a long time after the camp was quiet.

"No," Johnnie answered. He had been looking at the stars, and watching the fire die; he had been wondering. His mother wasn't the kind to make such a fuss about a farewell—she certainly wouldn't have ridden thirty miles just

to say good-bye. No, she had followed the herd with the intention of taking Johnnie home, but something had made her change her mind.

"I been thinking, kid," said Big Jim, and now there was an awkwardness about his words, too. "I been thinking it would have been mighty nice to have a mother, which I never did. Don't you ever do anything to make her grieve, kid."

"Don't aim to," Johnnie said.

Everything was quiet again. The embers dulled and smoked, and the stars leaned close and clear, and the boy could barely hear snatches of the night riders' songs, faint as the last-remembered notes of a lullaby. He resolved, drowsily, to be as much like Big Jim Ketchum as he could.

THE BAR NINES trailed steadily toward the North Star, crossing the Colorado and the Lampasas and the Brazos, driving through rain and shine. At Fort Worth, two of the riders quit, and Cy Bradley replaced them. And then, by virtue of seniority—and at Big Jim's insistence—Johnnie Parton escaped from the drag, and rode flank or swing, proud as a peacock with two tails.

Now he could really see the panorama rolling under the hoofs of the longhorned cattle. Now he learned how to handle a herd on a dry drive, when the waterholes were far between; and one night when lightning split the black sky and loosed a flurry of stinging hail, he found what it was like to ride with a stampede. Big Jim showed him how to keep the wagon bed dry in river crossings, by putting blocks between the bed and the axles. It was Big Jim who taught him to pick a bed ground for the herd, with an eye to water and grass and campfire fuel, and the vagaries of the weather.

When they came to the Red River, a half mile wide and shining like a pink ribbon under the sun, it was as Big Jim had predicted: Lightning, the belled lead steer, took to the swimming water like a duck, and pointed the herd across. Cy Bradley saw the value of the big blue steer; he had already decided to take Lightning back to Texas after the drive.

Riding night herd, with only a song and the stars for company, Johnnie Barton had time to think. Cattle weren't a lot different from humans, in some respects. A cow strayed into the herd and was driven several miles with it—until she made her presence known by bawling loudly for the calf that had been left behind. And when the farmer discovered her loss and came to get her, he said that calf was already weaned.

In any bunch of cattle, too, there was a leader—a big, splendid animal the rest would follow. The bunch looked up to him just like everybody looked up to Big Jim Ketchum.

Everybody, that is, but Bart Seely. That first little argument rankled, and later a dispute came up concerning Big Jim's need for a certain saddle horse. And one night up near the Kansas line, the wrangler called Big Jim a name.

Neither of the men was wearing a gun. Big Jim moved so quickly Johnnie could scarcely see what happened. But he heard the smack of a fist, and there was Seely sprawling on the ground clear beyond the circle of firelight. Big Jim was on him, too, before the wrangler could get to his feet—Big Jim was hammering him again, and laughing with reckless joy all the time, as if fighting were the most natural thing in the world to him.

Something about that laugh and the quick, wildfire excitement of battle was infectious. Before he knew it, Johnnie Barton was on his feet, ready to pitch in and help his champion if help were needed.

"Bust his nose!" he yelled. "Give it to him, Jim!"

Bart Seely was almost as large as his opponent, with heavy shoulders and long, powerful arms. He broke Big Jim's grip and rolled clear; he scrambled to his feet, bloody but unhurt. The firelight flickered yellowly in his eyes.

"Ketchum," he panted, "I'll kill you for that!"

Somebody pushed Johnnie aside. It was Cy Bradley, stepping between the two men, putting a hand on the chest of each.

"All right, boys—cool down!" he said sharply. "Cut it out! There won't be any fighting in this outfit—not while we're trailing cattle!"

Bart Seely wiped the blood from his cheek. "I can wait," he said surlily. "I can wait till the drive's over."

"Forget it!" Cy ordered. "And set down, both of you!"

Big Jim Ketchum just laughed again. You could see he wasn't afraid of Bart Seely, or anybody else. You could see he'd be ready when the Bar Nines were in the shipping pens at Dodge.

But Cy Bradley was the boss, and the next day both men went ahead with their work as if nothing had happened. A couple of times, when the herd stopped for nooning, Seely went far enough away so the shots wouldn't disturb the cattle, and Big Jim and the rest could hear him practicing with his pistol, shooting a tomato can full of holes. Big Jim just smiled; he didn't need any practice.

"I had a little talk with Bart," the cook confided to Johnnie one day. "Told him he's loony as a coot if he picks any more trouble with Big Jim Ketchum. Seems like he hadn't heard what Big Jim can do to the five of diamonds with a gun."

Maybe Bart Seely had decided discretion was the better part of valor, maybe not. Johnnie

Barton only knew that the threat of the feud was smouldering. And all the time, deep within the boy lay the bright, exciting promise of seeing the sights in Dodge City, making him forget almost everything else. The town, Big Jim said, was the cowboy capital of the whole world.

Johnnie would buy a Stetson there like the one Big Jim wore; he would find the same kind of boots. The rest of the outfit already laughed to see how Johnnie sat his saddle, just like his idol; how he copied Big Jim's walk and other mannerisms.

That last week of the drive seemed a year long. It had been nearly four months since the herd left the Cibolo, but finally there came an evening when it bedded down on the holding grounds south of the Arkansas. Other Texas outfits were camped round about, their fires twinkling like fallen stars, their crews whooping it up over the toll bridge and into Front Street. Cy Bradley doubled the night guard because of the grand mixup that would result from a stampede.

Then Cy went to town to arrange for space in the shipping pens, and to get any mail that might have been waiting for the Bar Nine crew. Big Jim and Curly McGee saddled up a little later, announcing their intention of being first in the barber chairs. But Johnnie was on the job that evening, on the double-strength first night guard.

"Tell you what, kid," Big Jim said as he prepared to leave. "You can come in when your guard's over. It'll be about ten by the time you get there. Where'll we be, Curly—at the Long Branch?"

Curly made a face. "That's a tony joint, and it's north of the deadline," he objected. "Up there you have to check your gun and watch your step. I aim to cut loose my wolf and let him howl!"

"Well," grinned Big Jim, "we'll make it south of the deadline, then. After all, the kid's got to see the sights. Meet us in the Lady Gay at ten o'clock, kid!"

CY BRADLEY brought the mail. There were two letters for Johnnie from his mother, and one for Mr. Jim Ketchum, addressed in the same handwriting. Johnnie Barton took Jim's letter into town with him.

Now, riding across the two-bit toll bridge toward more lights than he had ever seen in all his life, he found that ten o'clock wasn't late at all, the way Dodge City figured time. There was a whole stream of Texas riders crossing the Plaza and turning down beyond the railroad tracks. You could hear yips and hollers down that way, and the clatter of running horses, and the music of tinny pianos. And there was a background for all this medley of gaiety—an undertone upon which the merriment was based, the town itself founded. It was the murmurous bawl and bellow of thousands of Texas cattle in the shipping pens.

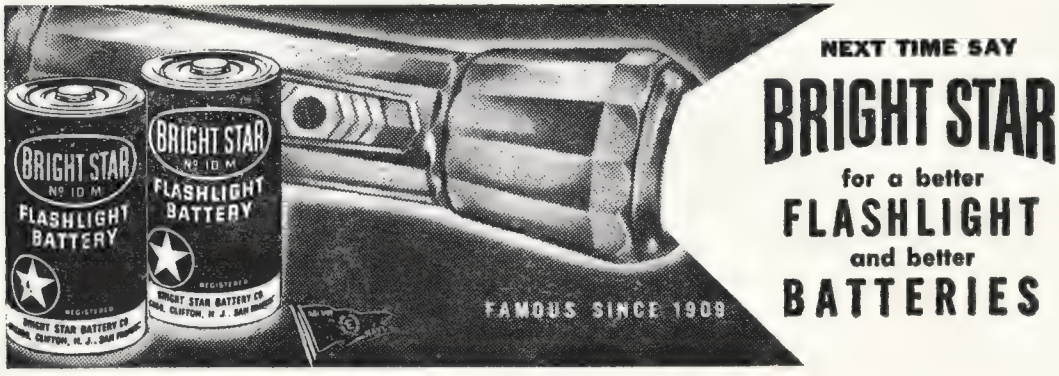
Johnnie Barton tied his horse to the hitching rail in front of the Lady Gay. Cowboys jostled him as he strode across the wooden sidewalk, swaggering a little, feeling every inch a man. Cy Bradley had advanced him twenty dollars; tomorrow he'd draw the rest of his pay, and send most of it home. But tonight he was his own man.

He pushed open the swinging doors. There stood Big Jim Ketchum, facing the entrance, left elbow resting on the bar, right hand free. Big Jim's gun was hitched around almost in front, and the sight of it brought the boy up short with a shock of remembrance. Big Jim was waiting for Bart Seely.

But he smiled, in his old, easy manner. He called, "Howdy, kid! We thought maybe you got too sleepy to come in. What're you drinking—lemonade?"

Johnnie saw Curly McGee grin at this, and he crossed the floor deliberately, making his spurs jingle. "Make mine a beer," he said, just as if he were an old hand at ordering beer. "Well, I see you boys got sheared."

Big Jim's eyes flicked to the doors, but the



man coming in now was a stranger. He was as steady as a rock, Johnnie saw, and the boy felt, more than anything else, a purposeful coolness that ruled the older man. Curly McGee was flushed and a little shaky, but Big Jim hadn't drunk too much.

"Stick around, kid!" Curly advised. "Only be ready to step over yonder against the wall. You're goin' to see something!"

"Seely?" Johnnie asked.

Curly nodded, and finished his drink. "He's been all around town, getting himself liquored, and making talk. Says he's going to shoot Jim on sight." And he laughed, then, to show how unworried he was about the outcome. "We left word where we could be found."

Big Jim said, "Forget it, kid—have a good time! You ought to get your picture took, tomorrow. First time up the Trail."

Johnnie Barton choked on his beer. He said, "Gosh, I thought Bart was scared off. Ain't you—don't you feel a bit—well, nervous? I mean—"

"Why should I?" laughed Big Jim. "It's up to Bart. If he's just got to have it, I can't stop him. A man can't run out on anything like that."

No, Johnnie thought, *a man can't run out.* There was music in the place, and laughter, and the dry rattle of poker chips at the gambling tables. Glasses and bottles clinked behind the bar, and a big mirror there multiplied the lights. He saw his own face in that mirror, wind-burned, and tanned, and drawn tight with the excitement rising within him. He looked almost scared.

"Set 'em up again!" he told the bartender, and reached into his pocket for the money. It was then he found the letter for Big Jim.

He handed it over. "Mail for you," he said. "Looks like it's from Ma."

Big Jim's eyes widened with surprise, and a flush of pleasure came into his cheeks. "Well, what do you think of that?" he drawled. "I never figured she'd remember me. That sure was mighty nice of her to write me!"

He opened the envelope and read the penciled message, smiling that white-toothed smile. "She says she hopes I'm well, and that we didn't have too much trouble with the cows," he reported. "And she says, 'I won't never be able to thank you for taking such good care of Johnnie, teaching him the things he ought to know, and keeping him out of trouble.'"

"Yeah," Johnnie said. "She's right. She's—"

He saw the smile leave Big Jim's face, and he jerked his eyes toward the door. Nobody was coming in. Johnnie said, "What's the matter, Jim?" but the big man only shook his head, and frowned as he lifted his whiskey glass.

He held up the glass for a long moment, looking at the lights reflected in its amber contents, and at himself in the mirror. Then he put the glass on the bar.

"I'm drinking beer," he told the bartender.

The doors opened then. Johnnie Barton looked that way, and saw Bart Seely coming in, drunk, but not too drunk. His eyes caught the light and showed a yellow glint, the way they had that night by the campfire. He held his hand half raised, and out from his side, and his gun swung there below it.

"Get back, kid!" warned Curly McGee.

JOHNNIE couldn't move for a couple of seconds. Curly caught his arm and pushed him toward the wall, and all down along the bar men moved back. The music stopped, and there was a last whispered shuffle of poker chips. Everybody was frozen; everybody was watching Big Jim Ketchum and Bart Seely.

But Big Jim didn't look at Bart. He looked at himself in the mirror, instead, and all at once he unbuckled his gun belt and laid it and the holstered pistol on the bar. He said to the bartender, "Keep these for me," and Bart Seely laughed tauntingly, and took two more steps forward.

Then he stopped. "Afraid, ain't you, Ketchum?" he asked loudly. "Checked your gun because you're yellow!"

Big Jim's arm twitched, but he kept it on the bar, and his hand was on the beer bottle. He glanced into the mirror, and met Johnnie's eyes there, and saw the wondering surprise in them.

"Run along, Bart!" he said with an effort. "I don't want any trouble from you."

Seely came closer, walking with his feet wide apart. He said, "You got trouble with me already. The drive's over. I ain't workin' for the Bar Nines any more, and this is a showdown. I thought all along you was just a big bag of wind!" He stopped, and waited the space of a breath. "You going to get your gun back, Ketchum?"

"No," Big Jim said in a low voice. "Run along, now!"

Seely looked around, laughing again, feeling that the crowd was with him. He said, "And you killed a couple of men! Well, I've killed *three,* Ketchum, and I can make it four. Or, if you don't aim to get your gun back, I can do this!"

Johnnie Barton forgot that he was holding his breath. He tried to shout a warning, but no words came, and there was Bart Seely's hand flashing up and out toward Big Jim. But the hand was empty. Seely struck Big Jim across the cheek with the flat of it, and then stepped back, crouched and watching.

"You got a yellow streak up your back a mile wide!" Seely said contemptuously.

Big Jim Ketchum sighed, and looked at Johnnie in the mirror again. He said, slowly, "I reckon there are times when a man can't keep out of trouble," and Johnnie saw the angry red mark turning darker on his cheek. He turned, then, and lashed out suddenly at Bart Seely with a swinging right.

Seely staggered, and then hit back, swearing and grunting. Big Jim knocked his guard down with another freehanded swing, and slammed his left fist through to the jaw. Seely lurched backward, tripping on his spurs and falling over a chair. Big Jim stood where he was, and all at once he was laughing in that reckless, joyous way that set Johnnie Barton's nerves tingling with excitement.

Seely rolled over on hands and knees in the sawdust, grunting again as he pushed himself to his feet.

"Look out, Jim!" yelled Curly.

Johnnie saw it, too. Bart Seely was pulling his gun underneath his doubled body—pulling it with his left hand. He came up in a twisting crouch, and the gun hammer was rising. He could hardly miss at that range.

He snarled, "I'll give you until I count three to get your gun, Ketchum! One—two—"

Big Jim dived in low, while the men behind him scattered and hugged the wall. The gun made a flash of brightness in the light of the oil lamps, and sawdust kicked up along the floor, and then Bart Seely's feet went out from under him again. Big Jim caught his left wrist in his right hand, bending it backward. The gun fell to the floor, and Big Jim's left fist hammered Seely's chin again.

Then he got up, spinning the cylinder of the gun and throwing the cartridges into the sawdust. He said, "Seely, if you're still damn fool enough, I'll meet you any time you say. But if you're smart, you'll keep going. Here. Now clear out."

He handed Seely the empty gun. The wrangler got to his feet, wiping the blood from his mouth. He went out the door without looking back, and Johnnie Barton knew that if Seely hadn't been smart before, some smartness had been hammered into him.

THE Lady Gay came alive again, and men bellied the bar with eagerness to buy Big Jim a drink. But he got his gun back, and turned to Curly and Johnnie. His face was troubled.

"Let's get out of here," he said.

They rode back to the Plaza and across the toll bridge, and nobody spoke. Johnnie listened to the noise of Dodge City fading behind them. It came to him all at once that it had taken more courage for Big Jim to hand his gun over the bar, and to take that slap on the cheek, than it had taken the time he killed the two men. It was clear that a man ought to avoid trouble when he could, but not at the cost of his self-respect. He felt a warm pride in Big Jim.

They reached the Bar Nine Camp, and Big Jim went straight to the light of the campfire and read his letter again.

"Kid," he said slowly, "I wish you'd tell your mother I sure am much obliged for this. It's the first letter I've got in ten years. And you tell her I tried to learn you things, but . . . well, when she hears about what happened tonight, I reckon she'll think I let her down."

Curly stiffened. "What's wrong with what you done?" he demanded.

Big Jim was looking out over the prairie where the scattered campfires winked. "She kind of expected me to set an example for the kid. She'll figure that fight could have been avoided. And after she hears about it—"

"Shucks!" said Johnnie Barton. He didn't know it, but his voice sounded deep and grown-up. "I don't aim to tell her more'n what she ought to know, Jim. Some things are men's business. And you can thank her for the letter, yourself, when we get back down on the Cibolo."

YOU GET THEM ALL IN
FOR SOLID COMFORT
LHS PIPES
CERTIFIED
PUREX
at your dealer's
Check List of Pipe Value
IMPORTED BRIAR BOWL (vita-fused for sweetness) ✓
ALUMINUM SAFETY LOCK ✓
ALUMINUM MOISTURE TRAP ✓
ALUMINUM SHANK LINING ✓
$3.50 Model No. 14. Dozens of other handsome models. Plain or antique.
Made by L&H Stern Inc., makers of LHS Sterncrest Pipes $5, $7.50, $10

ILLUSTRATED BY
NEIL O'KEEFFE

HELLIONS FOR HILO

JONATHAN McBEE, newly shipped chief officer of the blue water freighter *Fair Isle*, rounded the darkened corner of the pier shed full into the rain-weighted blast of the seasonal nor'wester raking the San Francisco Embarcadero. His eager stride halted abruptly as the driven rain caught him between the lowered visor of his uniform cap and the upturned collar of his peajacket. He took an involuntary backward step into the sheltering overhang of the shed to shake water from his sodden cap.

Before him, seeming huge in the storm-dimmed lights of the warehouse, the *Fair Isle* lunged ponderously at doubled-up mooring lines, surging impatiently against the groaning stringer pieces of the wharf. McBee gazed up speculatively at the lowered booms and battened hatches of the big vessel and a faint smile of satisfaction broadened his wide mouth. Secured for sea. The second lucky break for Jonathan McBee within the hour.

The coops were a jumbled mass of wreckage and the gamecocks were flapping and struggling in the water dammed up against the lee bulwarks.

By
STEVE HAIL

The first of course was the berth itself. Chief mate's billets, much less master's jobs, were getting hard to come by in these post-war months, what with better than half the battered merchant fleet gathering slime at lay-up anchorages.

McBee caught himself guiltily half-smiling at the misfortune of the *Fair Isle's* regular mate in coming down with an ailing appendix on midnight of sailing day. Of course . . .

"Shipping, Mister?"

McBee started, recovered and swung around to face the portly figure in oilskins and gold-wreathed cap that had approached unheard and unseen in the deadening din of rain and wind that slashed down the dock.

McBee recognized from hiring-hall description Captain J. Malcolm "Blinker" Jones.

"Y-yes, sir," he said. "I'm the replacement you ordered." His freckled fist delved into the pockets of his jacket for the assignment slip.

The master of the *Fair Isle* scanned the proffered paper and blinked disapprovingly at McBee. "Harumph," he grunted. "I see this card is countersigned by Captain Ryan, the night superintendent." His eyes hardened with suspicion. "Friend of yours, Mister?"

McBee passed a puzzled hand across his rain-wet cheek. "Why—why, no, sir. The call came into the hall an hour or so ago. The *Fair Isle* was sailing at daylight. I—I just happened to be there, sir. I came right away. The office, that is, Captain Ryan sent me down. I—I . . ."

Jones interrupted with a grunt of patent disbelief. "Stow it, Mister. You'll have to do, I reckon. Get your gear aboard. We'll single up at five." He pocketed the hiring slip, eyed his new mate sharply once more and stalked off down the dock in definite dismissal.

A half hour later, unpacking his personal gear in the quiet of his room, McBee pondered his frigid reception by the master of the *Fair Isle*. It was common gossip, he knew, along the waterfront that Captains Jones and Ryan had never been known to see eye to eye on anything since they had been deck boys together more than twenty years before. He knew, too, that Ryan's recently having been selected over J. Malcolm Jones for the lush shore job of night superintendent had done nothing to improve their relations, but as to where he, Jonathan McBee, fitted into the obviously unhappy picture . . .

McBEE'S thoughts jarred to a sudden stop, a mis-mated sock dangling forgotten in his arrested hand, as outside the porthole the predawn silence was disrupted by a sound that was at once raucous, petulant and unquestionably recognizable even to the unaccustomed ear of a deepwater mate like McBee. Stark disbelief shadowed his lumpy features as the demanding crow of a rooster was repeated and joined by others in a rising crescendo of abuse. The chorus swelled over and above the whining of the gale in a cacophony of discordant clamor.

The sock in McBee's nerveless fingers dropped unnoticed to the deck. Dismay struck close to his heart. Chickens! Chickens for deck cargo without a doubt. With a force eight nor'wester howling down the coast.

Outside again, McBee heard purposeful steps taking the cleats of the gangplank two at a time. Then the door of the master's room down the alleyway crashed open and shut and J. Malcolm Jones stomped past making for the head of the gangway to meet the midnight intruder.

McBee sighed dourly, remembering his premature satisfaction of an hour ago. It was with a conscious effort that he finally reminded himself of his responsibilities as chief officer. Hurriedly, he slipped into his peajacket and followed.

In the glare of the cargo cluster lighting the plank, he saw the captain blinking rapidly and expostulating with a big hulk of a man who was waving a sheaf of papers in one menacing fist.

McBee recognized Ryan, the night superintendent.

On the dock at the foot of the gangway a multi-wheeled truck pulsed idly, its load of crated fowl filling the night with loud indignation.

"Chickens!" McBee heard Captain Jones explode. "For the *Fair Isle*? There's some mistake, man!"

Ryan spat forcibly and a stream of thoroughly masticated cut plug splattered against the deckhouse. "Billed for you, Cap," he said, wiping his mouth with a hand the size of a three-sheave block.

Captain Jones eyed the spot where the tobacco juice had splotched his newly-painted white bulkheads. His eyes popped. "Is this a steamboat or a ruddy farm wagon?" he rasped, then kept on, not seeming to expect an answer. "I'm five years in this rust bucket and carried everything on deck from howitzers to a carnival menagerie. But I—I—chickens! Gad, man, has the freight department gone completely mad?"

Ryan sucked noisily at a gold incisor. "They're not chickens exactly, Cap, although I admit they're billed as such. They're fighting cocks. Consigned to Hilo. Three hundred of 'em. Special shipment. Very valuable. It's up to you . . ."

His voice went on convincingly, explaining. But Chief Officer Jonathan McBee no longer listened. His brain was pounding with the staggering prospect of riding herd on three hundred-odd bantam roosters exposed to the force of a wild coastal gale.

Captain Jones' raging voice broke finally into McBee's self-pitying thoughts.

"Fighting cocks!" Jones roared. "Why—why you . . ." He stuttered, searching for a suitable adjective. "Why, you liver-lipped counter clerk," he finished, employing a seaman's worst possible insult, "they're not legal, fighting cocks The *Fair Isle* don't take 'em. Make a ruddy bird bootlegger out of me, will you—you . . ."

Ryan chewed placidly and audibly. "Wait now, Cap," he said. "Don't go off half cocked." He grinned at his own joke. "That's why they're listed in the bills of lading as chickens instead of gamecocks. Satisfies the law, you know." He winked slyly at McBee. "It's my idea, gentlemen," he went on, "and a very good one, too, I think. As a matter of fact I don't mind telling you that I'm looking forward to a berth in the uptown office. It's men with resourcefulness and ideas that Island Lines wants. Ideas like this one for instance. Even G. A. Sorenson, the traffic superintendent, has been keeping an eye on me lately, I notice. Why . . ."

Captain J. Malcolm Jones made an uncomplimentary sound with his lips. ". . . and not only that," he said, "but we don't take your chickens. We—"

Chief Officer McBee, fearing for his superior officer's blood pressure, chanced what was meant to be a soothing interruption. "Tsk, tsk. Captain Jones," he said, "perhaps . . ."

The clucking sound was a mistake.

Jones' eyelids became a blur of motion. "I'll thank you, sir, to keep your lip out of this! And don't think I didn't see Ryan pass you the wink a while back." He turned again on the night superintendent. "Get out!" he stormed. "Get off this blinkin' ship. I'll see you in a hundred-fathoms hell before I take your ruddy boids—birds."

The skipper's shore-going diction, McBee was learning, tended to curdle considerably when he got excited.

Ryan spread both hands in mock helplessness. "O. K., Cap," he said resignedly, "but the office . . ." He began a tactical retreat down the gangplank, but his bearing was that of a man confident of an argument won.

The office. Sobering words to an old-line shipmaster. Even as McBee watched, Captain Jones' eyes blinked less hastily, and long before Ryan's bulk had disappeared into the darkness of the pier shed Jones folded resigned hands over his ample midship section and spoke to McBee. "Get 'em aboard, Mister," he sighed. "I suppose we gotta take 'em. After all, you know, the office."

The bantams, McBee found, were crated separately, an evident concession to their irascible natures. It made the task of stowage somewhat easier, however, so within the hour the coops were stacked in rows, three high, amongst the deckload of lumber and crated machinery already chain-lashed to the after deck.

At the last moment Captain Jones descended from the bridge long enough to order a tarpaulin spread over the lot.

"Shelter 'em from the weather, it will, Mate," he explained apologetically. "Valuable, them birds."

McBee shrugged the collar of his peajacket closer around his neck against the force of the gale whistling around the corner of the galley and told himself bitterly that Captain Jones was something of an optimist as well as an office-fearing fool. He spread the tarpaulin.

AT three bells sharp in the morning watch, the *Fair Isle* slipped her dock lines and gathered slow sternway out of the berth. As the bridge came abreast of the end of the wharf, McBee, from the dubious shelter of the anchor windlass, made out the dim figure of Ryan braced against the fender piling, flapping his arms symbolically. McBee saw Jones shake a pudgy fist and shout obviously uncomplimentary remarks toward the pier head, but missed the gist of the tirade in the violent chorus that arose from the after deck as the roosters got their first taste of the chill wind slicing down the bay.

To the mate's surprise, things went pretty well at first. The birds recovered from their first indignation and began to cluck contentedly to themselves, or at least, McBee thought grimly, as contentedly as could be expected from their naturally nasty dispositions.

As dawn lightened the sullen storm clouds in the east, the *Fair Isle* threaded her lumbering way through the tide rips of the Golden Gate and steadied down on the buoyed channel for the lightship. Mid-morning found her on the initial course of the great circle for Hawaii with the Farallons comfortably astern.

With her bulwarks down to the now unhampered nor'wester, the freighter settled down to slugging it out with the heavy, battering swell, and Chief Mate McBee, along with the watch on deck, resigned himself to playing nursemaid to three hundred thoroughly agitated bantam roosters.

It was all too evident that although the birds were reputed to be demons in the cockpit, they were something less than the lowliest domesticated egg layers when it came to seagoing.

McBee was standing in the shelter of the weather alleyway, morosely watching his charges trying to keep their feet in a seaway, when the first line squall roared out of the overcast to windward and whipped under the canvas shelter.

Even as he leaped toward the main deck, the mate saw the lashings part like worn

shoelaces and the tarpaulin disappear to leeward with a discouraging whoosh. A wild concerted squawk went up from the birds and followed the tarp downwind toward the Galapagos, three thousand miles to the south.

With the watch close on his heels, McBee set about tightening the lashings that still secured the coops to the hatch. The cold, salt spray arching over the weather bulwarks soon had McBee, the watch and the bantams equally soaked and wrathful. At last McBee jerked a final savage hitch in the securing lines and sent the men forward for dry clothes and coffee.

He had barely seated himself in the saloon in front of his own stiffly-fortified mug when portentous footsteps pounded up the passageway. The frightened face of the ordinary seaman, who had been posted to keep watch on Ryan's hopefuls, poked itself through the open doorway.

"The—the chickens, sir," the ordinary stuttered excitedly. "They . . . ."

McBee's characteristic control, ebbing fast since midnight, exploded into temper. The ordinary ducked just in time to avoid the coffee cup as it splintered against the bulkhead beside his head.

Mumbling to himself, McBee got up for fresh coffee, thought better of it, and staggered wearily aft in the wake of the seaman. As he reached the open deck he saw that the worst had happened. The *Fair Isle* had caught one just right and a solid sea had swept the hatch. The coops were a jumbled, splintered mass of wreckage and the gamecocks were flapping and struggling desperately in the several feet of water dammed up against the lee bulwarks.

In the midst of it all, roused out of a morning nap and knee-deep in salt water and roosters, waded Captain J. Malcolm Jones. His gold-wreathed cap was at the prescribed angle, but he was night-shirted, barefooted and extremely unhappy. His vocal stream of deep-water oaths, McBee noticed interestedly, consisted mainly of hyphenated words, the latter syllables of which sounded suspiciously like "Ryan."

Jones caught sight of the watch straggling reluctantly aft. He fixed a batting but baleful eye on McBee.

"Do something!" he howled. "Save those boids!"

"Yessir," McBee gulped, and waded in.

Even with the help of all hands and the messboy, it was the better part of an hour before the bantams were fished out of the welter of the after deck and carried to the comparative security of the boat deck where the carpenter, hammer swinging, nails and curses flying, was hastily throwing together makeshift coops.

Captain Jones, watching dully, murmured half aloud. "There are times," he said to no one in particular, "when I wish I were a bookkeeper."

"Amen," breathed Jonathan McBee.

"What's that, Mister?" barked Jones, suddenly aware of the mate's presence.

"I—I said, ahem, sir," McBee answered hurriedly, then turned to give Chips a hand.

It was still another hour before the cocks were secured and battened down in the lee of the radio shack. Captain Jones leaned wearily against a stanchion and pawed wrinkles of worry and weariness from his forehead.

"Harumph," he said finally, and tugged the tails of his nightshirt down fore and aft. "That should do your fine feathered friends for a while, Mister."

McBee looked blank. "My — my friends, Captain?"

"Yours and Ryan's," Jones snapped. "You're not fooling me, McBee. I begin to see why Ryan shipped you on here. To take good care that you don't lose your piece-off on these—these . . ." He stopped, startled and listening. "What's that?" he barked.

Sudden pandemonium had broken loose in the direction of the foredeck. McBee, his half-formed protestations of innocence forgotten, started forward, running. In full stride he was stopped dead in his tracks by what sounded like a full-sized riot from the direction of the poop. The master and chief mate of the *Fair Isle* exchanged startled glances. Jones jerked a peremptory thumb aft, then bustled off in the opposite direction. McBee, following the direction of his superior officer's thumb, turned and stumbled sternward. He hadn't far to go. The *Fair Isle* was the scene of an all-out feathered blitz.

With the warming noonday sun, the cocks which the watch had failed to catch were emerging from hidden crannies in the deckload. Their feathers and battle instincts appeared to be drying in equal ratio. They had obviously come forth looking for trouble. McBee changed his course for the bridge deck where the main action seemed to be taking place. Everywhere he looked there were bantams squared off in various attitudes of attack.

Harsh animal-like sounds focused his attention 'midships. There, on hands and knees, his head out of sight under the fiddley grating, crouched Captain J. Malcolm Jones. His broad, bare stern pointed skyward. As McBee watched, open-mouthed, Jones scrambled backward and arose gingerly to his feet, one hand nursing a bleeding gash on the tip of his bulbous nose. The other fist clutched a squalling, wing-beating hellion.

"Got 'im!" the captain boasted triumphantly. "And not badly damaged, either!" He waved the rooster like a banner of victory, at the same time attempting to shake the nightgown down over his dimpled hips.

Chief Mate Jonathan McBee passed a suddenly trembling hand across his eyes.

SO went the days. And the nights. Even with the passing of the gale and their entrance into the lulling latitudes of the northeast trades, discontent dogged the lives of all aboard the *Fair Isle*. The crew—and Jonathan McBee—pampered, petted, threatened and cajoled Ryan's precious gamecocks. They climbed the masts to pluck them out of the rigging. They crawled under the machinery of the main deck, scaled the stack, shinned up cargo booms to haul the bantams down, fighting, always fighting. Life on the freighter *Fair Isle* was not good. Life for McBee was worse than bad if only for the fact that Captain Jones vented his frayed nerves and irascible temper on his chief officer, seemingly holding him responsible for the veritable state of siege existing on the vessel.

McBee was forever being called from his watch below, whether day or night, to coddle the ruffled bantams, to feed them, water them and nurse their never-ending ills. Existence for the mate was a winged nightmare, lacking, however, a nightmare's surcease in a return to reality. This was reality, grim and bitter.

Meanwhile Captain Jones paced the flying bridge, salved the gash on his nose with soothing emollients, smoked, blinked and berated McBee. Mostly the latter.

It was late in the early morning watch on the ninth day out of San Francisco that a solution to the whole situation took hazy but portentious form in McBee's gloom-charged brain. It was in the latter part of the watch, as he was routinely checking over cargo manifests in the chartroom that the idea was born. Thereafter, the remaining minutes of the four hours became interminable as he turned the possibilities of the plan over in his mind.

By the time the third mate relieved the bridge at eight bells, McBee was seething with ill-concealed excitement. He went directly to his room, forgetting breakfast, again to pore intently and eagerly over the bills of lading for the voyage.

A half hour later, the papers clutched tightly in one hand, McBee knocked diffidently at the door to the master's room.

"Harumph!" came from within.

McBee, accepting the grunt for a sign of admittance, entered the room with reluctant yet purposeful steps.

"Ah—about these—uh—fowl, Captain, you know," McBee ventured hesitantly.

"Yes," said Jones, tenderly fingering the laceration on his nose. "I know!"

"If I may say so, Captain, I think we have all had enough of them."

"Yes, Mr. McBee," Jones said scathingly. "You may say so."

The mate laid the manifests carefully on the desk in front of the captain.

"The bills of lading, sir, for the—uh—deck cargo."

Jones' eyelids closed, opened and gathered way ominously. "If you've come here, Mister, to remind me . . ."

McBee made what he hoped was a tempering motion with one hand and went on recklessly, "What, sir, do you think would happen if we were to dock in Hilo tomorrow without the—uh—live cargo?"

A delicate heliotrope tint rose gradually above Captain Jones' collar. "I would say, Mister," he said coldly, "we would all be in a fair way of losing our jobs." He leaned forward and fixed McBee with an accusing eye. "And if my opinions are correct, sir, you and Captain Ryan would stand to lose a tidy bit of kumshaw." He rolled the ball of his thumb against the upturned fingers of his scarred hand significantly.

McBee's eyes sparked hot protest. "I—I tell you again, sir, I've nothing to do with Captain Ryan. That's why I've come to you with this plan for jettisoning the—uh—birds."

"Jettisoning? Have you gone mad, McBee? Our jobs wouldn't be worth bilge-sweepings. Jettisoning indeed!"

"If we had a legitimate excuse, sir?" McBee persisted.

"The insurance, Mister. There would still be a payoff. Ryan—"

"That's just it, sir," the mate broke in eagerly. "I—I've just looked it up. There is no insurance on livestock shipped on deck. Now . . ." He paused and looked at the captain pleadingly.

The master of the *Fair Isle* grunted, settled back in his chair and waved McBee on as if humoring a sub-normal child. "Speak up, Mister," he said with deep sarcasm. "If it will help you any."

The mate turned over one of the bills of lading and pointed with a rather grimy forefinger to the fine printing on the back, midway down the page.

Captain Jones read silently, a smirk of amused tolerance curling his jowls. As his eyes progressed down the page the smile faded slowly and a look of serious interest seamed the corners of his mouth.

". . . goods of a dangerous or noxious character," he read half aloud, "shipped without full disclosure in writing to the carrier—that's us all right, Mister, the carrier—of their nature and character, may at any time before discharge be thrown overboard, destroyed or rendered innoc—innocuous, if in the opinion of the master such cargo shall become dangerous or noxious to the ship or the crew thereof."

Jones raised thoughtful eyes to McBee. "Would you say, Mister," he asked, "that those bantams are dangerous?"

"To life and limb, sir," McBee answered feelingly.

The captain nodded soberly, then turned the page frontside up again. "There is nothing," he went on musingly, "about their characters in this." He flicked the paper with thumb and forefinger. "Chickens, it calls 'em." He snorted disdainfully. "I ask you, McBee, is that what you would call full disclosure in writing? The answer? It is not."

"Exactly, sir," the mate beamed. "Just what I had in mind. Ryan, you see . . ."

But Captain Jones was no longer listening. "Dangerous," he mumbled to himself, "and—uh—nok . . ." He raised his eyes to McBee abruptly. "Mister, are those birds nok—noxious?"

"Captain," McBee said excitedly, "those boids—birds, I mean, are very noxious indeed."

Jones nodded absently and his hand went again to the festering scab on his nose. "I will be more than glad, Mr. McBee," he said after a while, "to follow your suggestion. We will jettison the bas—ah—birds."

He stood up, took a few quick steps across the room, swung around and turned a beatifically blinking gaze on McBee.

"Look," he said, "I will give them a break they certainly don't deserve. I'll let them fly for their lives." He drew a chart out of the top drawer of the desk and spread it out before McBee. "This is Hilo," he pointed. "We are due off the breakwater at ten in the morning, but . . ." His fingers followed the coastline of Hawaii south and east to where a bulge of land jutted out to sea thirty or forty miles from the harbor entrance.

"Here is Cape Kumakahi," he explained. "That is our landfall. We will raise it, if your navigation proves sounder than your other work, Mister, around midnight. There is deep water within a few hundred yards of the beach. The prevailing wind is westerly. Do you follow me?"

McBee nodded silent comprehension.

"Tonight then," Jones went on, "we will pass within half a mile of the cape. You will see to it, sir, that these ruddy roosters are, shall we say, helped over the loo'ard rail, bound west."

Master and mate looked each at the other with grim smiles of mutual understanding.

CAPTAIN JONES, as good as his word, put the *Fair Isle* so close to the beach that, had it been a day earlier, Jonathan McBee would have been sorely tempted to try the short hop himself. As it was, the knowledge that his persecution was soon to end stayed his longing glance at the white line of breakers close aboard.

The bantams required some urging for their takeoff over the lee rail, but nobody, much less McBee, was reluctant to furnish the necessary persuasion.

Within an hour after midnight, the *Fair Isle* groped her way up the mountainous coast of Hawaii, free, untrammeled and roosterless.

The bright Hawaiian sun was close to the tropic noon when the big freighter ran her dock lines and dropped her gangway overside to the Hilo wharf. The tackles had barely been secured when the Island agent for the office came bounding up the plank. He came toward Captain Jones, bustling and business-like.

"Well, well, Captain," he said, grabbing J. Malcolm's fat fist. "A pleasant voyage, I presume?"

"Yes, and again, no," Jones answered cautiously.

"About the bantams, I mean." The agent let go the captain's hand to arch a thumb toward the after deck. "They stood the trip well, I hope?"

"Oh, them," Jones said, blinking sadly. "They gave me trouble no end. As a matter of fact I had to jettison the lot. Down that way." He waved a hand toward Cape Kumakahi, blue in the distance.

The agent's cordial manner changed abruptly. "You—you threw them overboard?" he stuttered unbelievingly.

Captain Jones nodded solemnly and winked a warning at McBee. "Dangerous," he told the agent, "and—uh—noxious."

The agent's countenance was as dark as a Kona squall. "Captain Jones," he said coldly, "if those fighting cocks are not on board there will be a great deal of hell to pay. Your job will not be worth—Why, the office . . . Mr. Ryan and I had—"

"Ah! That explains it. I see I wasn't far wrong," Jones said, suddenly grim. "You and Ryan, then . . ."

A booming voice from the direction of the gangway interrupted the skipper's accusations.

"Captain Jones?" the white-linened owner of the voice queried authoritatively.

McBee's eyes widened as vague remembrance jelled to certainty. He took an involuntary backward step.

"G. A. Sorenson," the newcomer identified himself briefly, "traffic superintendent for Island Lines. Clippered in from San Francisco this morning. Authorized by the directors to conduct an investigation of this vessel."

Captain Jones cleared his throat nervously. The agent attempted to shrink into the unyielding steel of the deckhouse.

"The Interstate Commerce Commission,"

Sorenson began tersely, "traced a shipment of game cocks to our San Francisco terminal. It is known they were shipped on the *Fair Isle*. A strictly illegal and—ah—unethical commerce I might add. Now, Captain, if you'll be kind enough . . ."

"Uh," Jones said not very helpfully, thinking and blinking at the same pace.

The Hilo agent wiped beaded moisture from his upper lip. "But Mr. Sorenson," he said, interrupting the skipper's stutterings with more of his own, "I—I'm sure there's been a mistake. You won't find anything resembling gamecocks on the *Fair Isle*." He fixed a beady eye on J. Malcolm Jones. "Will he, Captain?"

"Uh—" Jones said again, but before he could gear his lagging tongue to the pace of his eyelids, Sorenson was continuing.

"That's hard to understand, gentlemen, and regrettable, in a way. You see we've been forced to take court action against one of our veteran employees because of this affair. A Captain Ryan by name."

Sorenson referred to a batch of typewritten sheets in his hand. "Frankly," he went on, "the shipment was definitely traced to this vessel—through the trucking concern. However . . ." He ran a perplexed glance around the roosterless decks of the *Fair Isle*. "However, it seems there has been some grave mistake. Obviously there is no evidence here to back up our legal action. Very embarrassing. Very. Ah, I'm afraid, Captain, you will have a very fancy bit of explaining to do upon your return."

The traffic superintendent pocketed his papers. "Our Captain Ryan will have to be suitably compensated for this error of course. Ah, well. Must be getting back, gentlemen." He nodded curtly at Captain Jones. "See you in San Francisco, Captain." There was an anticipatory glint in his cold eyes as he turned away and started down the gangway.

"Mister McBee!" The hardness in J. Malcolm Jones' voice was matched only by the bright shine of his eyes under ominously blinking lids as he suddenly turned on his chief officer.

"Y-yessir," McBee said, which seemed as good as anything to say at the moment. "I—I . . ." His glance dropped under the fury of Jones' gaze. Dropped, hesitated and came to rest on the scabbed and swollen protuberance that was Captain Jones' organ of smell.

"I—I . . ." he repeated, then sudden remembrance coupled with the sight of the captain's proboscis galvanized him into action.

Two quick strides put him opposite the porthole of the unused spare room in the starboard alleyway. His clenched hand darted to the thick glass, pushed forcefully, and the port swung wide. From within burst a throaty crow of triumph and release.

The traffic superintendent, halfway down the gangplank, paused, startled. That instinctive action was all that saved him from a resounding clip on the ear. A whirring ball of feathered fury sped past his Panama and landed with a thud on the dock. Another triumphal crow followed the landing.

Close behind, Jonathan McBee made a flying leap past the petrified figure of the superintendent in frantic pursuit of the escaping evidence.

"Hmm," Sorenson said, and retraced his steps up the plank.

"Uh," said Captain Jones, blinking dumbfoundedly.

"Ulp," gulped the agent, and slunk toward the gangway.

". . . a cute character this Ryan," Sorenson said a little while later, seated at the captain's desk. "Deals of this nature have been going on for quite a while, we understand. I've had a time catching up with him. Nice work, Captain. Cooperation and all that sort of thing."

His fingers drummed slowly on the desk. "Aren't you just about in line for that night superintendent's position in San Francisco? I'm sure if my recommendation would help in any way . . ."

"Well, uh, now that you ask, sir," Jones said and blushed modestly.

Sorenson allowed himself a bare, but reassuring smile, gathered up his papers, shook hands and departed.

Captain Jones broke the thick silence following Sorenson's departure. "How is it, Mr. McBee, that you happened to have this boid—uh—bird on tap, so to speak? Very mysterious, that sudden appearance."

The mate ran a nervous finger around the neckband of his shirt. "Well, sir," he explained hesitantly, "I—I grew rather fond of Icarus—that's what I named him, sir. He—he's the one, if you'll excuse me, sir, that opened that nasty gash on your nose. I kept him in the spare room and somehow overlooked him last night. I . . ."

Slow redness washed up behind Captain Jones' ears and his brows lowered menacingly at his chief mate.

Out on the dock, caged Icarus, exhibit A in the case of the States *vs.* C. P. Ryan gave forth with an ill-tempered crow of discontent and general bad temper.

Captain J. Malcolm Jones' visage softened in spite of himself and his eyes came back into focus on his chief officer. An honest man, McBee, straightforward and —yes, by gad, an officer worthy of command. His smile widened indulgently as he blinked benevolent forgiveness at Jonathan McBee.

TEN MINUTES

ILLUSTRATED BY CARL PFEUFER

By GEORGES SURDEZ

●

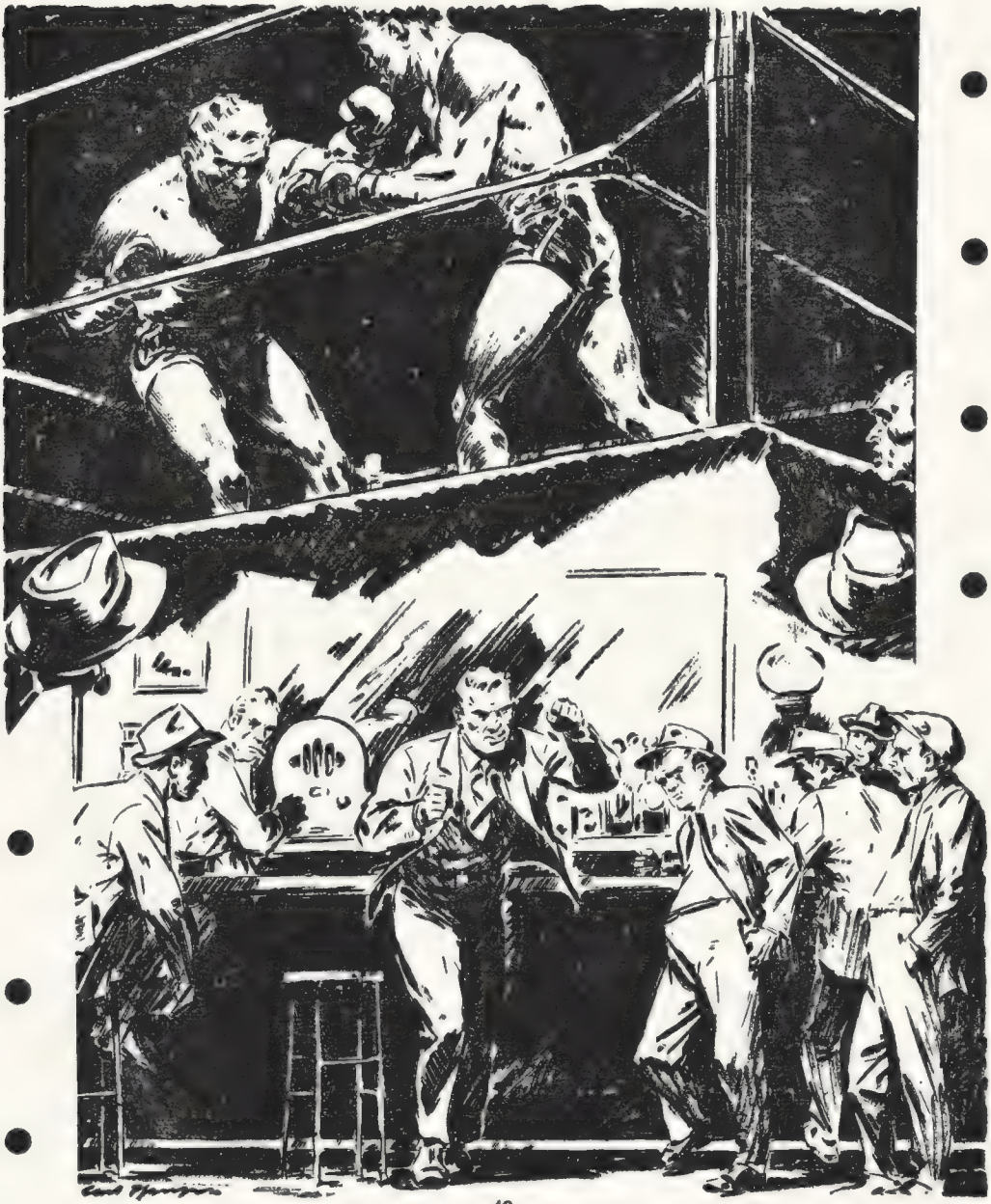
"I carried the fight to him," Bill told the men at the bar. "I tagged him with a left that shook him up. . . ."

IT WAS almost nine o'clock when William B. Coyle entered Vince's Bar and Grill. There was the usual crowd there, seven or eight fellows whom Bill had known four or five years, although he would have had to think hard to give you any of their last names.

There were two strangers, one silent and surly, the other edging into the conversation once in a while. The radio was on, playing popular music, but nobody was listening to it. Gus was behind the bar. He nodded when Bill nodded, slid a bottle and a glass down the shiny wood, drew a small beer.

"Hello, Bill," they said and he grinned and nodded. This was his night, but there was a ceremonial to be observed. He had that drink and a second. The surly stranger looked at him in the mirror a couple of times, and Bill looked back. So the guy paid up and went out. Bill smiled faintly. He looked in the mirror again—yes, he looked pretty big and broad, though size wasn't what did it—it was the look. Bill still looked like he could fight.

WITH THE GREAT



"Hanson won't go six rounds," the talkative stranger was saying. He had bought drinks and accepted one. "Hanson's good, but Jack has the class. That's what tells, all-around class. Hanson, he can't do nothing but punch. Jack can box, he's smart—and he can punch, can't he?"

Then Gus grinned at Bill and those who had their backs to him half-turned to look at him. Bill sipped that second drink, said nothing and waited. He didn't have to talk, somebody would tell the guy. The guy was edging toward making a bet, but he got worried and hesitated. He didn't want to lose ten bucks—and when pressed, he took refuge in considerations of odds. A man about forty-five or-six, whom Bill knew as Charlie, beckoned him over at last. "Have one on me, Bill. Bill, set this guy straight—" He put one hand on Bill's arm as Bill came up and went on: "Here's a guy can tell you something about Jack. He fought him, you know."

"No kidding?" There was a tinge of doubt in the stranger's voice. "What's your name?"

"Bill Coyle."

"Kid Coyle, they called you? Yeah." The man frowned in deep concentration. "That was seven years ago, wasn't it? You went four rounds."

That was not an amazing feat of memory, for the newspapers had printed the champion's record that day, together with his age, his weight, what he had eaten for lunch and his prediction for tonight's fight. Nevertheless, Bill nodded, smiled and felt soft and warm.

"Four rounds, yes," he said.

"Jack fouled him," Charlie said.

"I never said that." Bill shook his head. "It wasn't called a foul, so it wasn't a foul. You take the breaks the way they come. He hit me after the bell. Maybe it was an accident, nobody but him can tell if he meant it or not. Just the same, I can say I was giving him trouble, and he wouldn't fight me again. You can check on that." He tapped his leg. "I kept after him a couple of years, then I busted this pin and it's weak." Charlie ordered him another drink, gave him a cigar. "I don't limp, no, but it's weak. The Army turned me down." Bill shrugged and concluded: "If I hadn't busted my leg, I might—well, no, I'm going on thirty-six and that's old. They're calling Jack an old man, and he's not even thirty-two yet. Yes, that's right. He was just twenty-six then, and that's the prime for a heavy. He was better than he can be tonight."

"They say he's the hardest hitter—hits awful hard, eh?" The stranger looked up at Bill and asked his question respectfully.

"Well," Bill looked into the little shining brown disc in his glass, cuddled inside his palm, like gazing into a crystal ball, "Jack hits quick and he hits sharp. It's tough to explain, if you haven't had it. A guy could hit hard enough to break your jaw or crack a rib and not knock you cold. Another guy hits you, knocks you out and hardly leaves a bruise."

HE SETTLED one elbow on the bar, propped one foot up, looked from face to face and lifted his voice above the blare of the radio. "Look, a guy can hit you in the body and leave welts like saucers and you keep on. Another smacks you in the guts, just right and snappy, and you fold up. It's speed and timing—so when you say Jack hits hard, well, he don't hit as hard as a lot of other guys, but he hits fast, and he hits right. You might say he's a sharpshooter."

"A sharpshooter, eh?" The stranger was interested.

"Yeah. It's this way, see—" Bill held up a broad palm. "I'm bigger and heavier than you are, see, and if I put my hand on your chest and shove, you'd have to move back or fall over. But it wouldn't hurt as much as if I just clipped you—there—" He lifted his hand again, flipped his index to the side of the chin. The stranger blinked and backed away. "See what I mean?"

The man unconsciously adjusted his lapels, brushed his coat.

"Sure, right on the button," he said, to show he knew.

He ordered drinks, but he kept four feet away. He did not like to be demonstrated upon, that little flip had jarred him. Bill knew he didn't like it, but he knew it amused the others. They didn't laugh, they never said anything, but when there was talk about fighting, they liked to have him around and to have him show off a bit. Fight nights were his nights. They'd get him to talk about Jack, the champion, and the time he had fought him. Bill talked because he liked to talk, because he liked admiration. For something more than ten minutes, he, Bill, had been very close to a gentleman who had made as high as four hundred thousand bucks in three minutes!

So Bill talked about that fight, seven years ago, before Jack had been champion. When he talked of that, Bill always had a sensation that he split into two separate beings. One kind of slid outside and stood by, listening, with some remorse and amazement. Because he talked about the fight the way he liked to have them think he felt and the way they could understand he had felt. He did not lie, yet he did not tell the truth.

"I was coming along good—"

He had been twenty-nine that evening and he had been fighting for eleven years. Professional that is; he had had fights for three years before that. So he had had a pretty good idea he was not going very far. His own manager

had told him that four thousand bucks was a lot of money for him and that Jack never got nasty unless you tried to pull a fast one. He had been coming along good—he had been knocked out once, stopped twice and decisioned any number of times. He talked of five and ten thousand bucks, and until he met Jack, he had never done better than twelve hundred!

"I'd won my last seven fights on knockouts—"

His string had been three, against poor fighters, and he had thought he'd blow the third one, the guy had really licked himself. But the papers had announced seven wins, so he was safe. He talked as if he had earned that fight with the coming champ with victories, when in fact he had been picked because he was not too dangerous. His manager, who liked to wisecrack, had even said he was a tune-up for a tune-up. He had laughed, because he had had few illusions.

"Were you scared?" the stranger asked. "They used to say guys were paralyzed before going into—"

"No." Bill laughed, telling the truth. "I wasn't scared. I remember that guff about guys being petrified before the fight. What the hell was I to be scared of? He'd never killed anybody, and you don't go into the business if you're afraid to take a punch.

That was the truth. He had not been scared. Not before the fight. He could think back and recall that he had even dreamed of the impossible, the lucky punch and the chance at glory and money. You couldn't help thinking of that and hoping. You had the same number of arms and legs, you were as tall, as big, as heavy. And nobody is immune to a good sock in just the right place, one of those sharpshooter's smacks.

"I though I had a pretty good chance to win—"

You knew, of course, that a guy like Jack had something you lacked, but you didn't like to own up to that. You knew it was all a matter of balance and speed. You'd heard the doctors talk of co-ordination of eyes and muscles, of split-second reflexes. There might be a miracle and you might have one of them. It only needed one, just one. Your common sense kept telling you that the quick reflexes come to a guy like Jack a thousand times before it happens to you once. But you were strong, experienced, well-trained and still young. You had two arms and two legs!

"It was just like any other fight—"

IT HAD been the sixty-third time he had climbed through the ropes as a pro. So he had felt no stage fright. It was the truth, he had not been scared and it had been just like any other fight. In fact, he could remember several fights when he had been more scared and nervous. And not of name fighters, either. There had been the time he'd fought a guy who'd been a miner and had had an accident. The guy's left arm had kept a crook in it, and it was said that he hit awfully hard with it, hooks from a funny angle. That had scared Bill in advance.

But that night against Jack, he had not been nervous, not until just after Jack had come in and looked at him from his corner. Jack had not seemed mad, but mildly curious, absorbed. Jack had looked at him just once, without blinking, without showing any particular expression. Then he had looked down just like he had told himself, "Oh, this guy'll be O.K. for me."

"You can look it up in the papers," Bill went on. "You'll see I was O.K., not scared or anything like that."

But after that look, his left knee had started to jerk up and down, and his manager had laid his hand on it, leaning close and talking easily. "Stop worrying, Kid. Take it easy, keep away from him, try to give the customers a show." Because it was a local arena and Bill might get a couple of good-paying fights if he made a showing. In thirty seconds, that jerking in his knee had passed away.

And he'd gone forward to get the instructions. Jack had looked at him again when they'd been introduced, and half-smiled. He looked like a nice, quiet guy, but his casual glance had got Bill. Some guys ducked your eyes, and not because they were scared, either; others tried to give you the eye. This guy, Jack, did not do anything in particular, acted just like they were meeting anywhere, say in somebody's parlor.

Bill had looked at his knees and seen they were relaxed, steady. Jack had big calves and thighs, most good hitters have. He was not quite as tall as Bill, maybe an inch shorter, and while his shoulders were big and muscled, they weren't extraordinarily so. But he moved easily, smoothly, and it was hard to find words for just how he moved. He didn't remind you of a panther or a bear, he was simply a well-knit, poised man. He looked older than his age, many fighters do. He acted sort of calm and steady, like an electrician come in to fix a floor-socket.

"I carried the fight to him," Bill said. "You can check that—"

Yes, Bill had carried the fight to Jack, he had hit him first, with a left. From outside, it had looked swell. To those who didn't know. Jack was not hard to touch, but he was hard to hit. It was that exceptional co-ordination again, that split-second timing which made him better than others. He moved about easy and slow, but he got the goat of anyone fighting him, because he was impalpable, fluid.

Your blows landed, but they had no im-

pact; it reminded Bill of those nightmares where you hit someone and find no resistance and get no result. Jack boxed the first rounds almost lazily and some reporters claimed he had no defense. That a fast man could hit him at will. Bill found out in one minute that this was because Jack saved motion—maybe he didn't even know he was doing it, it was natural to him, but he turned, twisted and bent so that the blows never struck solidly.

He was plenty strong too, wiry strong, but he did no mauling and little shoving. His face was calm, his eyes were studious, unworried. He looked like a man with a bunch of keys in his hands, sorting them out at leisure, sure that he has the right one, that it is but a question of time.

"They talk a lot about his hooks," Bill went on, as new drinks were poured out by Gus. "Well, his left jab isn't so lousy—"

For Jack had punched back right along, if only one or two punches to Bill's six or eight. Again, he looked lazy and he wasn't. His punches were queer, there was a kind of flowing softness about them at the beginning. They were sharp enough to jar you, though. You could see them start and they seemed to float at you; they looked easy to duck, then they jolted you. And you felt, all the time, that Jack was just trying out something, setting you up. He didn't care how he looked from outside, he knew there would be no decision.

"I took the first round, everybody agreed," Bill proclaimed.

That was the truth, all the papers had agreed on that. Yet Bill had gone to his corner feeling that the other guy had loaned him the round. "He's coasting," Bill's manager had said. "He didn't let go anything."

Bill went on with his yarn. He had had maybe five, six drinks, and as many short beers, and he was beginning to feel warm. Also, he knew that he had started to show how things had gone, with gestures. And he knew that these guys, although they liked him and sincerely admired him, were inclined to think he was a bit punchy. Well, he was an ex-fighter in a saloon, so what was he worrying about? These guys would bend your ear telling you how they'd put a deal over or told off the boss, and there was nothing funny in it, but you told them how you'd fought against a guy who was champ eighteen months later, and they had to hide their grins! His good nature was slipping, and he didn't know why.

IT WAS like something operated by a clockwork inside his head, this getting wise to the fact that they were kidding him a little, just about this time in the story—and he would remember later and wonder why he felt that way. His face was growing red and he felt the small muscles in his cheeks starting to pulse.

"I'm not kidding, I took that round, look it up—"

"Sure, Bill, we know—"

"I remember you did," the stranger agreed. "I was in Buffalo then, checker in a plant making auto parts—I'd missed the radio—"

"So Sal, he was my manager—" Bill carried on. Funny how some guys wanted to talk—this gink would have passed up the story of the fight told by one of the fighters, just to tell what he had had for breakfast as he read the newspaper account. "So Sal says, 'Didn't I tell you to keep away? He'll knock your brains out—' and I said. 'Oh yeah, just watch and see.' "

Just watch and see. Maybe he had said that. Maybe not. You said a lot of things when you were sore. And he had been sore at the end of the round, because the guy was rubbing it in. Jack had timed the round just right, and just before the bell had sounded, he'd let go with that half smile of his, and heaved with his shoulders to shove Bill away. Then he had turned, just as the bell rung, moved four steps and sat on his stool. That wasn't a new trick, exactly.

"I went after him in the second, and shook him—"

"And," said the radio suddenly, *"that ended the fifth round in the semi-final bout between—"* The particulars strung out and the advertising plug came in. *"Three rounds to go—"* and Gus, behind the bar, reached out and turned the volume down a little. Nobody here was interested in that semi-final. Not when Bill was around. Gus alternately rubbed a wet spot before him with a finger, then with a rag.

Yes, Bill had shaken him. How much or how little, he didn't know. He'd got his glove on Jack's jaw, and slid by with hardly a jar, and Jack had bobbed his head and sort of circled with it, and Bill had hit again with the same hand, the right, and somehow had connected. Jack had twisted to one side and sort of stumbled to his own right, two quick, tripping steps. Bill had closed in, but the guy had turned fluid again. Jack was not a talker anywhere. In the ring, he said few words. This time, as he clinched, Bill had thought he was about to say something, but he'd half-smiled and nodded. The referee had let that one go on. Let it go on a little too long—not, when Bill really thought about it, that it would have made any difference.

"A smart referee rides with the wise money," he said. That was almost always true. Also, Bill dimly realized, although he had never put it into words, a referee was like any other guy, impressed by a big name and a big-earner. The referee had known that there

were newspapermen from New York and Chicago, and he'd put in some fancy snap and mannerisms. Maybe you couldn't know that watching outside, but you knew all right if you had worked with the guy. In this fight, he didn't shove you or yell, he tapped and said, "Break it up," kind of brisk.

"I'd hit him pretty stiff, and the referee came in like this"—Bill illustrated—"and then Jack clinched and he let it go. I was all set to follow up—like this—" He sketched another right hook, grunted, straightened and continued.

He wished he wouldn't let go punches like that, but they expected it. Just the way they expected certain words, like "downstairs" instead of stomach and mitt instead of gloves. If you'd been in the ring, right away you were supposed to talk tough, and if you used words like psychology and reflex, guys who worked in offices and had even less school than you did, kind of lifted their brows and looked at each other. But when they talked about their kids, they could use background, psychology and pedagogy, and that was all right. They expected you to talk like a reporter doing a boxing piece.

That second round had not been tough. Jack kept backing away slowly, softly, lazily, keeping against the ropes. But he was hard to corner and hit solid. And just once, he'd crossed over his right pretty hard. It had hit Bill on the cheek, pretty high up, and he had felt it. Not dazed or anything like that, but he had felt the bump, and the sharp impact had warned him. Maybe three inches lower and with some more steam, it would have meant trouble. The round had ended. Neither Bill nor Jack had been marked much—Jack wasn't a messy guy, when he could help it. He punched so hard he didn't need to cut a guy up and get him bleeding.

He'd done the same trick at the end of the second round, sort of breathed easier just before the bell, shoved Bill away and turned when it clanged. Bill had got back to his corner, not even panting. But the fool referee had come over, bent down and asked, "Feel O.K.?"

Bill had been startled by this. He wasn't bleeding, he wasn't feeling bad, he hadn't been knocked down, but the guy came over and asked him if he felt O.K.! Bill's manager had wondered about that, too, and later had said the referee was maybe nervous. He'd told Bill that maybe there was an explanation, because when Jack used that long straight left, his, Bill's head, would snap back and forth. Bill didn't remember so many straight lefts in the second round. But he'd looked at the movies since, and his head had bobbed around a couple of times. And with the reputation that guy had, they probably were looking for his head to fall off!

"He started to mix it in the third, right away, but I kept right with him—I went into a crouch, like this, and weaved—"

HE REACHED for the drink after showing them. Yes, Jack had started to mix it, coming in with that sort of slow shuffle, taking what Bill handed out the same old way, seeming to time his punches to fit in between. Oh, he was plenty good and he was shifty, no mistake about that. And when he didn't want to back up, he didn't. He kept bringing his right foot in line with his left, and Bill would back off. When a guy who's got more of everything than you have crowds you, you know it.

Funny thing, you could see Jack starting his snappy punches, but they were hard to duck, hard to duck—

Bill had taken two rights on the jaw, and he'd felt like a balloon had busted in his nostrils. He'd tin-canned around for a couple of seconds, then his head had cleared and he'd heard all the yelling. And he'd rushed Jack, who didn't want to back away, but had to back away just the same. He'd been crouched over, like this, and Jack had sort of drawn his belly in, and swung for his sides. Those had hurt, not stung only, hurt—felt like your insides sort of collapsed together. So Bill had dodged forward to get in close, and when he had straightened, his head had caught Jack under the chin.

"I wouldn't stop and he wouldn't stop, but I made the bum hold—he held first. I'd uppercut him in close and he didn't like that—and the referee just tapped him, tapped him, and he hung on and wouldn't let go. When we broke, the referee pushed me back maybe six feet, yelling at me to break when he said so, when I hadn't been the one holding—I saw the pictures after—he was holding—I ducked under his left and closed in again, and gave him the uppercut again—"

Gus tentatively twisted a control: ". . . *And in another ten seconds we'll come to the eighth round of the semi-final—*" and the loud voice faded again.

"The crowd was yelling—and he started to back away. I had him worried—"

Was that the truth? Had Jack been worried? You couldn't tell by his face. But he had stopped coming in, had circled again, hugged the ropes, slid out of corners. And that soft left had pawed out, smooth, like a rubber club with a lead ball in the tip. Then Jack had half-smiled, sort of relaxed his muscles in the clinch, shoved with his shoulder to clear himself, seemed about to turn. The end of the round, Bill knew. And he had straightened and backed away, waiting for Jack to turn as the bell sounded.

"He hit me after the bell, when my hands were down," Bill announced.

That was not the truth and he knew it. Jack had hit him with the bell, just as the bell clanged. But he must have been waiting for the chance, planned it. Because, this time, Bill had not seen that blow start, had not seen the tightening of the shoulder. His manager and the handler had carried him back to the corner. They'd worked on him. He'd been almost all right inside forty-five seconds, his head clearing. He'd heard the manager say, "You O.K.?" and the referee had said the same thing, standing just behind.

"I said sure, I was O.K. And I went out for the third—no, the fourth it was—" Bill controlled a wince. Why did he always falter and say "third" at this point, when he meant "fourth"?

He'd gone out for the fourth, but his head had not been clear. He didn't remember much of it, he knew, from the papers and his manager. He had seen the pictures—he'd been knocked down three times and the referee had pushed Jack away when he rose the last time at six, and called off the fight.

"I'd stayed down for nine twice," Bill explained to Charlie, the stranger and the others. "I knew what I was doing. That sock after the bell, when I was relaxed, had hurt. The last time, I got up at six, because I saw that the guy was making up his mind to stop it." He located his drink, swallowed it. "And that's the way it went. I tried to get another fight with Jack, because I knew how to fight him. My own manager laughed at me, but Jack knew, all right. Nothing doing. The way to lick the guy is to get in close, work on his stomach and uppercut him."

"Think this guy Hanson can do it?" the stranger asked.

"No." Bill shook his head. "He fights straight up."

"He'll get his head knocked off, then?"

"Well, Jack's getting on—this guy has six years on him."

Bill turned to his drink, found the glass empty. He nodded for Gus to fill it up, laid a dollar down, but Charlie pushed it aside. "Keep your money, Bill." He touched Bill's right arm respectfully. "Yep, this guy went four rounds with Jack, when Jack was at his best, in his prime. I saw the fight myself. He made the bum stagger in the second and knocked him back in the third. Just like he says, he was hit after the bell—"

JUST as Gus turned up the volume for the fight, a few guys walked in and ordered drinks. Some of them Bill knew and they grinned at him. "How'd you like to be in there tonight, eh?" Two strangers who had come in together took their place some distance away, drank and listened. Then they edged nearer and got into the talk and arguing that broke out between rounds.

"How is it going, Bill?" Charlie asked.

"Jack's feeling him out, taking it easy. Same old stuff."

"Bill went four rounds with Jack," Charlie explained to the newcomers. "Kid Coyle—right here in town, Jefferson Arena—" and they looked at Bill, as if they were trying to see the marks of the famous fists on his pan. "Bill got fouled, hit after the bell, the works, you know—referee was in on it, too—" and Bill caught his grimace and his wink in the mirror. "Just when Bill was about to knock him kicking, too."

Bill would have liked to explain to those who didn't know him that he had never claimed he'd been jobbed, that he'd never kidded himself, really, that he was in Jack's class. He'd started talking around here, with people he thought friends. They could stretch things a little, about their score at bowling, how they had played a hand at pinochle or bridge, how they'd coaxed the maximum out of a small pair. When they got fired—that used to happen, too, until anybody who could breathe could hold a job—they had told about it like they had won the day! But because there was big dough in fighting and the guys' names went into the papers, if you talked about it, you were funny. They liked to tell new guys who you were, but they winked.

"Now, they're in the middle of the ring again—Jack is very cool, Hanson's beginning to look worried—a right from Jack—light—" The announcer's voice thrilled with manufactured excitement. The round was slow, slow, both men were breathing, waiting, waiting—

That grin and that wink rankled in Bill's mind. He would have liked to pick up Charlie by that soft, flabby neck of his, shaken him. Charlie had a desk job in a plant, pulled down better than one hundred and twenty-five a week. He'd been proud of making fifty, two, three years back.

He could afford to spend for a few drinks. Bill liked to drink, but his wife had put him on a budget. There were four kids, the oldest fourteen. She didn't like talk of fighting in the house—she'd been badly scared when he'd got concussion. But she knew it wasn't human to make him stay home when there was a big fight. She just said, "Come in quietly, William." So, here he was, with maybe two bucks and some change. His credit was good, with the boss, Vince, and with Gus. But he had to be careful of that—it soon got so you couldn't pay off without the wife noticing you were twelve, fifteen bucks short somewhere.

Hundreds of miles away, under glaring lights, two men circled, jabbed and dodged,

and the announcer described a slaughter. He had to make it sound exciting. He knew it wasn't. People were always pretending something or other, lying in some way. Even the wife lied to him once in a while, when she'd paid a lot for a coat for the nine year old girl, for instance, out of which she'd grow in no time.

He'd lie to his wife tonight, too, about how many drinks he'd taken—he'd say four or five, just to avoid her clucking her tongue. And his oldest kid wasn't at the Scouts, this wasn't the night; he was somewhere listening to the fight, because his mother did not want to have it on the radio in the house.

"How is it going, Bill?"

"Slow, they ain't done anything yet. They got eleven rounds more." Bill shrugged slightly. He knew what was happening, by now. Jack was taking his time, getting used to the feel of things again, and Hanson was chewing his heart out, eager to take a chance, yet afraid of getting his head knocked off, not knowing how much the big fellow had left of what he used to have.

"Bill used to be a fighter, see," Charlie was saying to another man. "Went four rounds with Jack, right here in town, six, seven years ago, when the bum was just coming up into the big time."

"And there goes the first minute of the fifth round—you can see a little blood on Hanson's chin—one of those jabs cut his lip—Hanson looks worried now, stepping back and back—Jack's his old self, very confident—they're in a corner now—the referee—oh—a right, a left, another right, again the right—oh—he's hurt—another right, another right, a left"— and you could hear the mob howling—*"left, right, left, right—he's down—he's down—"*

"Same old stuff," Charlie said, with a sneer, and the others nodded, waiting tensely—they could hear the count now and they all listened silently as it went to six, seven—

"He's up, Jack is up—"

"What do you know," someone said, flatly.

"Hanson is after him, fast—Jack's unsteady, he's hurt bad. That was a surprise, gentlemen, a—ooh, Hanson is coming in, crouching—a right, a left, a right—in the body, just above the belt—Jack's looking right this way over his back—his face is calm—he seems to have recovered, he's cool—Hanson's close in again—punching for the body—he rips an uppercut to the jaw, another—Jack's in trouble—he's in trouble—he steps back—ah—he's down—that was a long, looping right—six, seven, eight—he's up, wobbling around—the referee steps away and Han—he's down—Jack went down again without being hit—the refer—it's all over—one minute and fifty-two seconds in the fifth round. Wait until I make that official—yeah, one minute and—"

NOBODY said anything much until Gus turned down the radio. Then they all started talking, speculating on how long Hanson could keep up. There were two, three guys who'd beaten him—he'd been stopped. Two, three years ago, Jack would have polished him off in two rounds. But your legs went, after thirty, couldn't carry you around, something happened to your co-ordination, your reflexes. The others were arguing about the fight already. Bill stood by and shifted his feet. Yep, he thought, when you got hit right, something happened to you.

"Didn't I tell you he was a sucker for an uppercut?" he said after a while.

Charlie looked up at him, then nodded toward Gus. "O.K., give him another one." He half-turned his back again. He knew a guy, he said, a mechanic at the plant where he worked, who'd been in Hanson's training camp once. "Used to fight himself, but welter. He told me to bet on Hanson, told me he's smart and he can punch—got myself four to one—"

Bill wanted to ask him why he had not bet, right here, before the fight. And he didn't like the way Charlie had told Gus to give him another one, as if he'd counted them, as if Bill had asked for a drink. Bill felt kind of sad, too. He'd listened to Jack's panting statement into the mike, the same baloney, to the effect that Hanson was a good, fast man, that he, Jack, had been rusty and that he wanted a return. And he knew that after this, Hanson could probably repeat, and that Jack wouldn't let himself believe it, that, wherever he was, Jack was sifting what had happened and *knew* that Hanson had not been wholly fair, that he had been tricked somehow.

"The bum went down without being hit," Charlie said. He had said it a couple of times already. "I always said—"

Bill did not shift his feet, he only had to move his right arm, and his fingers closed on the nape of that flabby neck, sunk in. Charlie straightened and brought up his hands to free himself. But compared to Bill, he had no more strength than a baby. He knew it and ceased struggling, his eyes watered and he asked in a nervous voice, "What's eating you, Bill?"

Everyone had turned and stared at them. Gus did not say anything, did not interfere. It didn't look like a fight.

"Jack's no bum, Charlie," Bill said quietly.

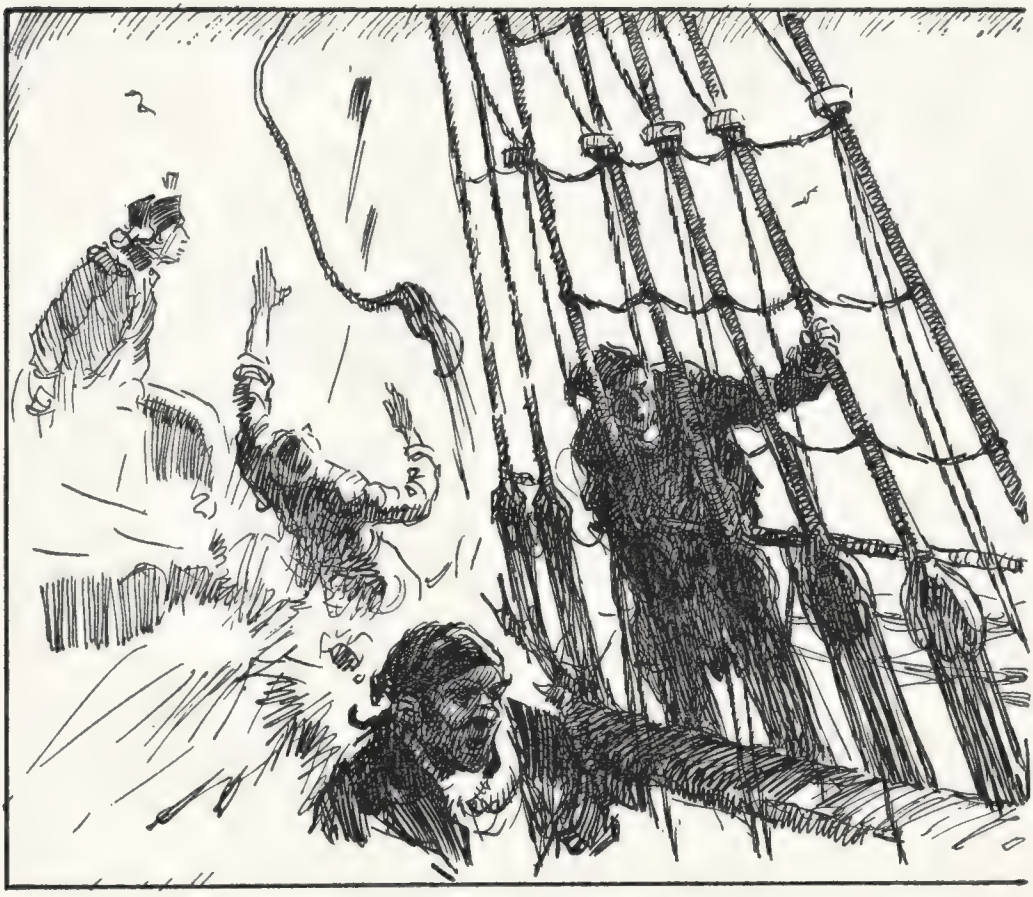
"But—" Charlie sort of fumbled his words—"you said yourself he fouled you that time—ahah, quit it, will you, you're hurting my neck—"

"Jack's no bum, Charlie," Bill repeated.

This time, Charlie got the idea. "Jack's no bum," he repeated. And to make sure, he said it again. "Jack's no bum."

(Continued on page 145)

ILLUSTRATED BY
GORDON GRANT

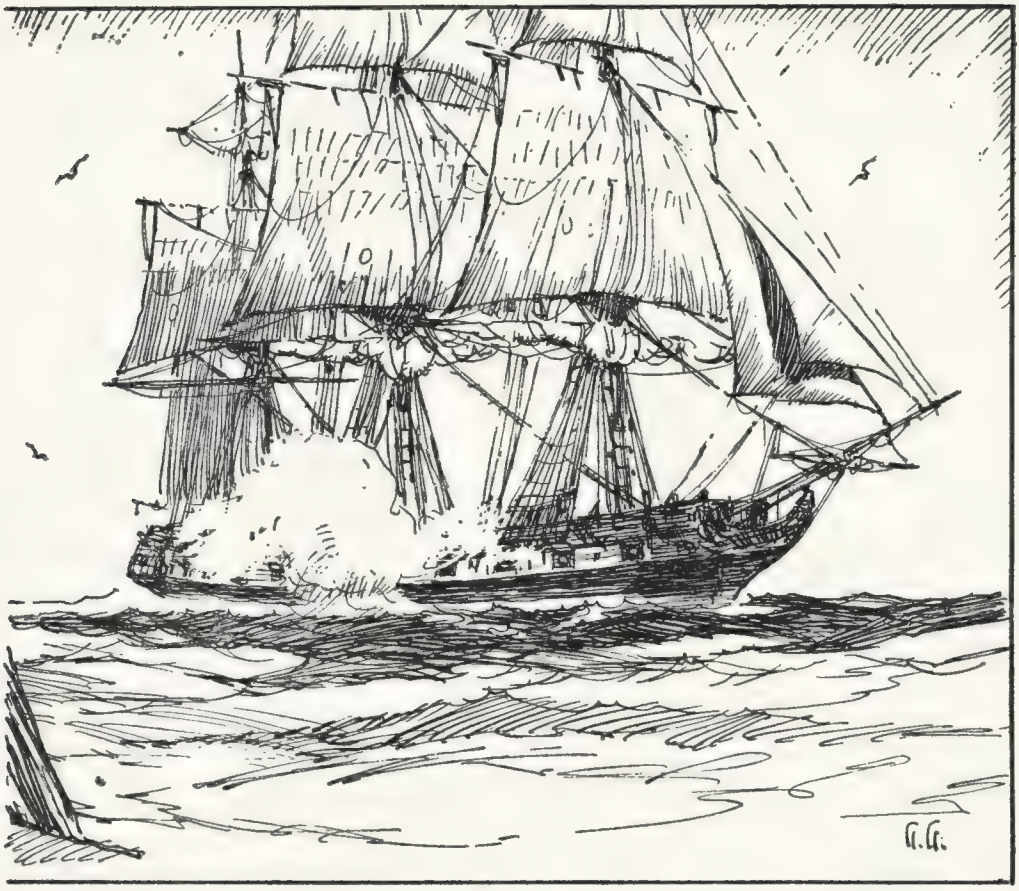


LIEUTENANT HARRY LARCHMONT GATES twisted his head to get another glimpse of the bright gold epaulette mounted proudly on his right shoulder, wished that the color were more salt-tarnished, and prepared, as his carriage halted, to report aboard His Majesty's thirty-two-gun frigate *Havoc*. Descending to the muddy Halifax street, he bade the driver deposit his gear at the foot of the dock, and strolled along the rough timbers toward his new ship.

He was of medium height and weight, and fair of complexion. His appearance was so youthful that he had been barely able to convince the austere examiners for a lieutenancy. After seven years as a midshipman in his cousin's ship-of-the-line, he had the rolling walk of a seaman, and despite the newness of his elegant costume, no one could mistake him for a novice freshly come to the sea.

The *Havoc* was whipping stores aboard from the dock, but he did not pause to observe the

SALT ON THE BRAID



The Havoc *heeled to the shock of her own battery, and had scarcely rolled back to port when the French shot landed.*

By

R. W. DALY

procedure, going straight to the foot of the brow that inclined into the entryport. A marine sentry smartly presented arms. Mr. Gates touched his hat in return, and then, on impulse, stopped.

"Your stock is filthy," he said, sharply eyeing the marine.

The man's weatherbeaten face betrayed resentful astonishment, as he mumbled, "Yes, sir."

"See that it's clean before next muster,"

Gates warned, and went up the brow, having managed to make himself a subject of discussion below deck. At the bulwark, he touched his hat to the colors, and stepped on the weatherdeck to be greeted by a veteran quartermaster who was completely indifferent to freshly made officers.

"Where is the officer of the day?" Mr. Gates snapped. His manner was barely short of that expected from a retired admiral.

Coolly, the quartermaster, surveyed the newcomer. "Below, sir."

"Send for him!"

"Aye, aye, sir," the quartermaster carelessly replied, and within a moment, a messenger was encroaching upon the repose of Mr. Hardwicke.

Grumbling, Mr. Hardwicke swung out of his sack. Dressing leisurely, he sauntered on deck to meet the *Havoc's* latest addition to her wardroom. Yawning, for the *Havoc* was lately returned from a long, wearisome cruise off the New England coast, Mr. Hardwicke walked to the gangway.

"Good morning, sir," Gates said cheerfully, and introduced himself.

Hardwicke did not turn out the guard and leap in the air with joy. "Morning," he murmured briefly, being unimpressed by anything short of a commodore. "Where are your orders?"

Gates promptly produced the necessary papers from beneath his cloak. Scarcely had Hardwicke begun to copy the pertinent data into the ship's log, when Gates, studying the careful script, eagerly made bold to offer a few suggestions as to how such an entry had been made on his cousin's ship.

"I don't give a damn if your cousin's the Admiral of England," Hardwicke growled amiably. "This is my watch and my log."

Sensibly, Gates refrained from taking issue with this slighting reference to his cousin, although he thought the lieutenant could have been a bit more careful with his language in front of the now grinning enlisted men. After the log had been attended to, Mr. Hardwicke escorted the newcomer to the wardroom.

Below the great cabin which belonged to the captain, the officers of the *Havoc* had made for themselves a cheerful haven in which to flee from the cares of their routine existence. A size larger than a servant's bedroom in a small London mansion, the wardroom was nonetheless spacious compared to the scant inches allotted each man of the crew.

THREE officers were seated on chairs and the transom, imbibing sufficient flip to warm them against their occasional duties about the weatherdeck. Even the least discerning observer would have been struck by the uniformity of their appearance. Save for a difference in uniform, they could have been the elder brothers of the powdermonkeys. England's aristocracy indeed went to war, but her Navy was kept great by officers from the bustling middle class. Whereas the French rigorously excluded all save noblemen from commissions, thus stifling the growth of their genius by removing competition, an Englishman with enough money to pay a tailor could try his luck at becoming an admiral.

Forsythe, small, energetic, blond, was the son of a successful tradesman of Manchester. Prowse, small, indolent, intelligent, was the son of a tutor at Christ Church. Tomlinson, tall, thin, stooped, rightly bore a ministerial aspect, since his father was a parson. The trio possessed a common badge of office: their eyes were quick and knowing.

"Gad," Prowse murmured lazily, upon perceiving the latest addition to the *Havoc*, "the gold is late minted."

"Gentlemen," Hardwicke said disinterestedly, "this is Mr. Gates." He kept the incident of the log to himself, being by nature a goodhearted man.

The gentlemen made appropriate acknowledgments, and Gates was given a glass of flip to cut the winter cold. Not being offered a seat, he dropped onto the transom beside Tomlinson who, having had a lifelong example of godliness held before him, smiled pleasantly.

"What think you of the ship?" he asked.

Discretion and judgment are virtues rarely found in new lieutenants. "She's dirty," Gates said candidly, innocently believing he had been asked for an honest opinion. "The men are careless in their attire."

Conversation died. The wardroom officers exchanged looks. The criticism, while true, made no allowance for the conditions which had soiled the *Havoc's* decks. A seasoned sailor would have recalled that the frigate had just made port, and so, would have praised anything he had observed which would reflect credit upon her organization. Altogether, the statements were unmerited and unnecessary. Even the placid Tomlinson was nettled.

"Indeed," the minister's son retorted caustically. "We would be delighted to learn how to make a ship look better on her first day in port after four months at sea."

Gates flushed and was silent, the magnet for all eyes.

After a minute, his colleagues ignored him and continued the discussion which his arrival had interrupted. Like all men at war, they were interested in peace. Tomlinson predicted that General Howe would finish the Colonials before another Christmas, while Prowse maintained that the French entry into the struggle would keep them on the bleak North American Station for another five years. Hardwicke ven-

tured to say that General Washington couldn't defeat British regulars unless the French landed a huge army to support him, and that, he felt sure, the Royal Navy would easily prevent. Forsythe, true to his heritage, was briskly content to have a long war, inasmuch as American merchantmen were fairly plentiful and prize money was always acceptable.

"Well, then," dourly observed a tall officer, who entered the wardroom at this point, "ye'll like my tidings. We sail in the morning."

"Lord, no!" Prowse groaned.

"That wench will have to wait," Forsythe commented, grinning happily.

Mr. Cruik, first lieutenant of the *Havoc*, wearily seated himself in the chair reserved for his exclusive use as president of the mess, and picked up a bottle. "Hullo," he said, noticing Gates, only after he had taken a heavy pull at the liquor. "Welcome aboard."

Having disposed of this official courtesy, he devoted his exclusive attention to the bottle, while the frigate's officers cursed the fat-bottomed admirals of the Navy. Eventually, one by one, they reluctantly went off to their various duties, and Gates was left alone with the second in command.

Gates sat expectantly, prepared to answer all the questions which the first luff would undoubtedly want to ask. Mr. Cruik, however, was oblivious to the youngster's presence, much less to the necessity of learning anything about the lad. Mr. Cruik was exhausted after two days and nights of navigating through foul weather, and brooded over the miserable manner in which the Admiralty operated the Navy. Frigates were so scarce on the North American Station that the *Havoc* was compelled to do the work of three. The ship had earned a rest for herself and her crew, yet, after only a few hours in port, she was obliged to cast off as soon as provisioned, to hunt down a Frenchman reported at Boston Town.

Mr. Cruik finished his bottle and bawled to the messboy for another.

"Sir," Gates said timidly, "where are my quarters?"

"Stab me!" the first luff growled. "Haven't you gone? Your stateroom is the first to larboard."

Gates stood up. "Is that all you want of me, sir?" he asked, disappointed at not having been urged to talk about himself.

The first luff sighed. "No," he said, wearily. "I may as well outline your duties. You will stand watch with Mr. Forsythe. Your battle-station will be on the quarterdeck."

Gates started in outraged disbelief. This was treatment to be accorded a callow midshipman. "Sir," he objected, "I am capable of standing watch by myself!"

"Perhaps," the first luff replied, annoyed to explain the obvious, "after you have become familiar with these damnable waters. Until then, Mr. Gates, enjoy yourself. You will soon have sufficient labor to suit your stomach."

Stung by the flat refusal to accept him as a useful member of the ship's company, Gates rose to his feet. "Sir," he said slowly, "I protest. I am a qualified officer."

"That is for me to judge!" the first luff snapped. "Be good enough to obey my orders."

"Yes, sir," Gates replied stiffly. "May I go to my quarters?"

"By all means," Cruik said wearily. "By all means."

AND thus did Lieutenant Harry Larchmont Gates report for duty aboard His Majesty's Ship *Havoc*, having successfully alienated all hands except the captain. His pride was offended past wisdom. On his first watch, he adopted the humble silence expected of a midshipman, and refused to accept one tittle of responsibility. To his chagrin, this attitude went unnoticed, as the *Havoc* cleared Cape Sambro and tacked down past Cape Sable into the buffeting billows of the Gulf of Maine. The voyage to Boston Town was less than four hundred miles, and little more than a good day's sail. However, the stiff westerly wind forced her to beat for nearly five nights before making a landfall on Cape Ann.

Throughout that time, Gates did nothing to earn his pay, since Forsythe stood a taut watch, efficiently handling the ship with the ease of long experience. Muffled in heavy clothes against the sharp cold, Gates might just as well have been comfortably below for all he accomplished above. Were he not convinced of his perfection, he could have learned much from the expert way in which Forsythe shortened or let out sail at the precise instant the *Havoc* most benefited by the change. Unfortunately he stood stolidly by, eyes on the gray, tossing waters, entirely unconcerned with the frigate or her maneuvers.

Once the *Havoc* settled down to the monotonous task of patrolling the approaches to Boston Town, Forsythe good-naturedly attempted to transfer some of his authority to his companion. "Mr. Gates," he said pleasantly, one afternoon, "you now know the ship. I see no need for us both to suffer in this blasted cold. Would you care to relieve me for half of our watch?"

"I will be delighted to do so, sir," Gates replied woodenly, "when Mr. Cruik so directs me."

Forsythe studied the lad. "That was rather uncivil," he said in quiet reproof. "For your information, the first lieutenant placed the matter at my discretion. In my opinion, you should stand watch by yourself."

"If you please, sir," Gates said stubbornly, "I am under Mr. Cruik's orders."

"Well, damnation!" Forsythe exclaimed disgustedly. He glared up at the lad who stood a few inches taller than he. "You may rot in hell for all of me!" Angrily, he stalked off to the helm.

Gates did not move, remaining with legs spread against the roll of the ship, braced against the lee bulwark. The shivering seaman and rating of the watch glanced significantly at each other. Forsythe was as popular with them as Gates was unpopular. They preferred lieutenants who kept them up to the mark, and Gates, who in his brush with the marine sentry had given indication of being a stern officer, would at least have gained their respect had he submitted gracefully to the necessary humiliation. The crew understood and appreciated the need to put a newcomer for a time under the eye of an older officer, and consequently despised Gates for his adolescent pout.

Phlegmatically, Gates stood at the ice-covered bulwark and stared unseeingly toward the coast. Their presence was unquestionably a matter of discussion in the Town, but he was unconcerned with the consequences. When the lookout at the masthead sighted a brig standing out from the Yankee port, his ears refused to accept the intelligence that put the *Havoc* on an intercepting course. He didn't give a damn about the cruise, the *Havoc*, or her complement, having in his sea chest a letter to the Admiralty requesting immediate transfer to any other vessel in the Navy.

Coolly, Forsythe sent for the captain, and prepared the frigate for action, running out the weatherdeck guns. The main battery gunports would be opened only in case of emergency, since there was little sense in flooding the ship with cold if her warmth could be preserved.

The captain was a mild, wise, little man, who considered his ship the best which had ever flown the white ensign. When he came on deck, all hands respectfully made way for him, and waited while he studied the merchantman through his glass. The crew had perfect confidence in him, for he had many times proved himself a master of his trade, and everyone aboard had profited in prize money by his skill and judgment.

"Carry on, Mr. Forsythe," the captain murmured, handing the glass to a hovering quartermaster. "You have done well."

Adroitly, Forsythe beat toward a collision with the adventurer. His expert seamanship kept the frigate constantly plowing toward her adversary, so there was little excitement in obliging the merchantman to heave to. She was a fair sized brig, but utterly helpless against the formidable broadside of the *Havoc*. Her skipper, who had hopefully pitted the wind against the fleetness of the Englishman, sensibly acknowledged the fact that he had encountered a better sailor, and stopped before Forsythe had to fling a shot at him. Trade being what it was in wartime, the brig's cargo would have thrice repaid her cost had she eluded the *Havoc* and escaped to a French port, so no one in the frigate condemned her skipper for apparent foolhardiness.

"Rig out the lee cutter," the captain ordered, while they drew near the halted merchantman.

Quickly, Forsythe attended to the matter, with the captain's gaze upon him as he had the heavy boat seized up by falls tailed onto the ends of the mizzen and main yards.

As her keel was being freed from the cradle, the captain said musingly, "I believe we will test our Frenchman's sportsmanship. Otherwise, we may well stay the winter here." Forthwith he went to his cabin to write a challenge.

Since the great guns were not needed, Mr. Cruik left his station on the maindeck and came topside. "What have we here?" he asked, glimpsing the preparations. "Where is the captain?"

When Forsythe explained, the first luff nodded in complete accord, being willing to sacrifice a few pounds, if the loss of prize money meant that the *Havoc* would the sooner return to Halifax. He looked amiably at Gates. "You might search him for rum before turning him back," he suggested.

Stiffly, Gates made a reply full of insolent meaning. "Am I to go, sir, in such a sea?" He indicated the icy water boiling in the short space between the two ships.

Cruik throttled an angry reply. It was his policy never to censure an officer before enlisted men, yet he was hard pressed to keep his peace in the face of such deliberate impertinence. He determined to have a long talk with the lad before nightfall, and said in a quiet voice, "No, Mr. Gates. You will not go. Kindly see to the cutter."

Whle Gates slowly went to the falls, Forsythe turned a rueful face to the first luff, and grimaced. Chances were excellent that the boat crew would be most uncomfortable before the afternoon was over. In deference to seniority, Gates should have volunteered for the disagreeable task, since the brig was not to be made prize. However, obviously caring nothing for the good opinion of his shipmates, Gates did not react in the accepted tradition. At that moment, he lost whatever tolerance the crew of the *Havoc* may have had for him.

The cutter was led back by a sea painter to the lee ladder, and her crew reluctantly entered. Forsythe waited on deck for the captain and the challenge. Struggling into waterproofs, he and Cruik ignored Gates, talking hopefully about the likelihood of goading the Frenchman into action. In the cutter, bounding drunkenly at the frigate's side, wretched seamen argued

with the coxswain to ask for a triple tot of spirits, when the boatswain offered them a double tot on their return. Across the way, the Colonials miserably awaited imprisonment in the frozen wastes of Newfoundland.

The captain took pains with his letter, carefully pointing out that the Frenchman could perform an excellent service for France should the encounter favor him, for the *Havoc* was virtually alone in her duties, and her defeat would free the port until her loss could be replaced. The ships at New York were completely occupied with their own affairs. Compounding a subtle temptation of cupidity and honor, he finally sanded his masterpiece and, satisfied that the missive would smoke his quarry out, applied the ship's seal to the wax on its folds.

Topside, Forsythe accepted the letter, sent a pitying glance toward Gates, and entered the cutter. The sturdy boat was tossed by the waves. Within a moment of quitting the frigate, spray soaked her crew. No one in the *Havoc* envied the boarding party.

On the quarterdeck, all hands obliged to be exposed to the weather watched the cutter struggle over to the brig. The captain quietly informed Cruik of his message, and the first luff agreed that the challenge might do the trick if anything could lure those gay French dogs away from the fleshpots of the Town.

Impassively, Gates stood alone, only troubling to see that the *Havoc* was ready to retrieve her boat. The captain looked at him for a moment, nodded at something Cruik said, and returned his attention to the brig.

Gates attempted to console himself with the thought that he had maintained his pride. Stubbornly, he felt he could not be criticized for hanging back when everyone expected him to step forward. From the first minute he had seen the *Havoc,* he had not been accorded the dignity of his rank. Being young, he was unable to project himself into his senior's boots and comprehend the risk of trusting an untried officer.

Forsythe quickly dispatched the business with the brig, and brought the cutter back to the frigate's lee. Gates waited for any sign from Cruick that the first luff intended to secure the cutter, but Cruik did not move. Curiously nervous at his first true trial of seamanship, Gates went to the bulwark.

At best, bringing a boat aboard was a difficult matter, and the weather conditions were not ideal. While a bowman made fast to a painter, the coxswain fought to keep the pitching cutter from smashing against the ladder. The bowman dexterously secured his block to the forward hook, and Gates cautiously began to take a strain on the falls. The stroke fumbled his job. Had he been adept like the bowman, the accident might not have occurred, as on deck, the men on the lines put their backs too vigorously into heaving. The cutter's bow was lifted high in relation to her stern, and a surging wave capsized her.

Blasphemy shrilled into the wind from the startled victims. Instantly, Cruik leaped to the bulwark, unwittingly brushing Gates aside in his haste to save the men and cutter. With quick commands, the first luff got lines down to the men in the water, while the frigate drifted down on them. Forsythe and a handful of sailors painfully scrambled onto the boat's keel. Unruffled in the emergency, Forsythe managed to get a pendant around the cutter's stern, and secured the swinging block himself. Then he and the sailors leaped for the landing where a pair of stout seamen stood ready to help them.

Cruik glanced at Gates. "Tell the surgeon to prepare for these men," he ordered crisply, and returned to the task of rescue and salvage.

Bitterly obedient, Gates went below to the orlop, wrathfully woke the dozing surgeon, and remained to render what assistance he could. One by one, the men came down. They were pitiful. Swiftly, they were stripped, wrapped in blankets, and laid on deck. Grimly, Gates watched their suffering and dosed them with whiskey. After a time, he knelt over the coxswain.

"How many in your crew?" he asked quietly.

"Eleven," the coxswain gasped, with a flash of resentment, "and Mr. Forsythe."

Gates gave him a mug of whiskey, and tenderly helped him drink. Only ten men moaned on the cramped deck. The eleventh man had never been brought down.

Night had fallen before Gates left the orlop. He eschewed the wardroom and, resolutely avoiding the eyes of the men he passed on the way, went directly to his quarters.

He stretched out on his sack. He was too late for supper and did not dare call a messboy to deliver some food. He was very cold. He lay in the dark and reconstructed the mishap, trying to detect any moment when he could have prevented it. He correctly imagined that he was the main object of discussion in the *Havoc,* and suddenly felt hot and uneasy.

Restlessly, he rose and went to see the first lieutenant.

Cruik was busily writing at his desk. His gaunt face was haggard with exertion and fatigue. "Yes?"

"Sir, I would like to discuss this afternoon."

Cruik leaned back. "Here, sit down," he said quietly, sweeping his winter gear from a chair. Pulling a bottle from his cabinet, he poured two glasses.

Gates declined the liquor, though his stomach craved it. "How is Mr. Forsythe?" he asked.

The cutter's bow was lifted high in the air and a surging wave capsized her.

"A bit chilled," the first luff answered, "but he has a constitution of iron. He will be on deck in the morning."

Hesitantly, Gates murmured, "Sir, I request a court of investigation."

"Indeed," Cruik replied. "Why?"

"A man is missing."

The first lieutenant studied his drink. His face was illuminated with pity. "Yes, a man is missing," he agreed softly, and then caught Gates with a steely eye. "You will have a court upon our return to Halifax. The captain has already ordered it. I regret to say you are under technical arrest."

Gates winced. With all his soul, he believed he had not been negligent, yet he had desired to retain a remnant of pride by forestalling the disgrace of arrest and a court. The captain had acted too swiftly for him. The court would find him guilty of incompetence, and he would be unable to claim honestly that he had been denied opportunity to demonstrate his ability.

Only his stubbornness had prevented his shipmates from knowing his mettle, and the disaster could have been viewed more tolerantly had he foregone his hurt pride and endured his second apprenticeship with a good will.

"Come," Cruik said encouragingly, "hold up your head. The court is merely a required formality. Anyone could have had an accident. We must render an account to the clerks of the Admiralty, that is all." He paused. "I would be honored to be your counsel, if you will have me."

Stricken mute, Gates stared disbelievingly at the first lieutenant. The kind offer confounded him. Cruik had given him scant notice since his arrival, and it was this disregard which had led him into sullen inactivity. Now, the first lieutenant was holding out a hand of friendship.

"This is hardly the time to lecture you on your past conduct," Cruik remarked. "I will assume you regret what is past, and will forget this week." He smiled gently. "I suggest you get some sleep. We expect to fight tomorrow, you know."

Numbly, Gates stood up.

"One thing more," Cruik said. "As your counsel, I would like to point out that our defense would be considerably bettered if you excel in your duty tomorrow."

"Yes, sir," Gates mumbled in stupefaction. "Thank you."

HE STUMBLED back to his stateroom, a thoroughly bewildered youth. In solitary darkness, he attempted to foresee the trial, and speculated on the possible defenses Cruik could offer. To maintain that the accident might have happened to anyone was generous, but hardly an extenuation. The accident had happened to him; that was the nub around which everything revolved. If his professional ability could be proved beyond question, Cruik would have an easy task. Gates mocked himself. Even if the Frenchman came out, he might not have a chance to vindicate himself. His battle station was on the quarterdeck, and it was exceedingly doubtful that the captain would require much assistance in preparing the *Havoc* for combat.

He cursed his stupidity. On the evidence available, candor obliged him to foresee that at best the court would censure him, which would retard his promotion for many years; at worst, he would be dismissed from the service. He thought of his family's probable reaction to the disgrace, and wished he had never left his cousin for the examinations in London. He was a thoroughly uphappy lad, despite Cruik's belated if traditional concern for him.

He was startled by daylight seeping through the chinks about the gunport in his stateroom, and ridiculed himself as he realized he had worried the night away. He lay quietly, listening to the growing sounds as the frigate came to life. Soon he smelled the odors rising from the galley fires, where messcooks busily prepared the morning meal for their mates. The smell of food was tantalizing. He hadn't been aware of hunger, although he hadn't eaten since the previous noon. He resigned himself to starvation; he couldn't face his comrades in the wardroom.

Being under arrest, he had no occasion to leave his stateroom except for the necessities of life. Unappreciative of the luxury of remaining in bed, he heard the forenoon watch under Forsythe go topside to relieve the four to eight. He wondered if there were any sign of the Frenchman, resolving to remain where he was until the frigate went into action.

Someone rapped at his door.

"Come in," he said, suddenly ashamed of being abed, and sat up.

Cruik entered. "Hullo," he said, smiling. "You seem to be enjoying yourself."

Gates got up. "Good morning, sir."

"It's rather late for breakfast," Cruik said pleasantly, "but I had some work to do first, so I ordered something to be kept. Would you care to join me?"

The first luff's tactfulness nearly strangled Gates. "Yes, sir," he choked. "Thank you."

"Good, then, I'll wait for you in the wardroom."

Dressing feverishly, Gates tried to remember why he had ever thought the first luff an insensitive scoundrel. He did not find the answer. He was tying up his breeches when the drums beat the ship to quarters. The Frenchman was coming out.

Almost immediately, the peace of the *Havoc* was sundered by the orderly confusion which readied her for combat. Gates had scarcely flung on his coat before the carpenters began to hammer at the partitions of his stateroom.

Topside, he found the captain in command, and quietly assumed his post by the helm. He was grateful for the excitement, since no one observed him. In seeming desperation, guncrews cast their weapons free of their frozen lashings, quartermasters bustled precious instruments below, powdermonkeys scurried to fill ammunition tubes. Here and there a gun captain swore at ice within his piece, and thawed out the metal with a blazing firebrand.

The *Havoc* was a well drilled ship, and cleared for action with the phenomenal speed of efficient men.

Gates studied the Frenchman. The enemy vessel was a large, graceful frigate of some thirty-six guns, and superior to the *Havoc* in every respect save personnel. She flew out of the channel, aggressively intent upon obliterating the proud little ship which had called her

out. In her wake followed a score of little vessels, some intent upon escaping to foreign ports while the fight progressed, others merely anxious to witness the duel.

The *Havoc's* captain was most accommodating. Once the Frenchman's acceptance of the invitation to fight was apparent, the captain put the *Havoc* on an easterly course to give them more searoom. So that his measure could not be mistaken as evasive, he carefully doused enough sail to make his purpose obvious. With the proximity to shore, the wind was of negligible consequence. The engagement would be conclusive.

The Frenchman had every reason to assume he would be victorious, having a stouter ship and heavier armament. He knew his strength, because the Englishman had thoughtfully listed his batteries. This was not presumption on the part of *La Bellone*, nor foolish of the Briton. Almost invariably English ships were outgunned by their adversaries, but they were rarely outfought.

When he judged that he had sufficiently cleared away from the shoals and reefs, the captain went on a port tack to the north, furling all square sails except the topsails. From time to time raising his telescope, he imperturbably waited for *La Bellone*. The sole officer near the captain, Gates respectfully stood by for whatever commands might ensue. The captain, in looking about the weatherdeck, noticed him.

"This should prove the warmest morning of January," the captain remarked cheerfully. "That chap seems to have some of these new carronades."

Surprised by the pleasant manner in which the captain spoke to him, Gates experienced a slight lifting of the weight in his heart. Eagerly, he plunged into a conversation about the murderous little guns, which, light in weight and short in range, could throw shot as heavy as sixty-eight pounds. Having developed the weapon, the English were naturally the last to adopt it whole-heartedly, and the *Havoc* had none. In close combat, carronades could easily turn the scale of victory.

Perhaps because of this advantage, the Frenchman did not turn to parallel the *Havoc's* course at the mile range traditionally favored by the *Marine Française*, but continued in to a thousand yards. Having the wind, he could close to grapple at any time he desired. Having the men, the *Havoc's* captain did not care.

After a few minutes of careful gunlaying, the Frenchman fired a shot which hurled over the *Havoc's* bow. This was a courteous request to strike colors, and in effect gallantly proffered the English the honor of discharging the first broadside. Not to be outdone, the *Havoc* returned a single shot. Fully prepared, *La Bellone* promptly accepted the gage and covered her side with smoke.

The *Havoc* heeled to the shock of her own battery, and had scarcely rolled back to port when the French shot landed. Expertly aimed, half a dozen heavy balls crashed through her oaken sides, spraying deadly splinters among the shivering Englishmen.

"How, now," the captain said thoughtfully, "the chap is hulling us." Inasmuch as French naval doctrine decreed that an enemy be assailed in his rigging, so that he would be helpless to move and thus an easier victim, the captain had cause for concern. *La Bellone* obviously was no slavish adherent to the Fighting Instructions, and the captain was thereby apprised of the fact that he had a resourceful, clear-thinking opponent.

"Mr. Gates," the captain said, "nail our colors to the masthead."

"Aye, aye, sir," Gates replied, and taking a holiday ensign from a quartermaster, rushed to the main shrouds. As he clawed up onto the icy bulwark above the chains, Cruik fired another broadside, nearly deafening Gates with muzzle blast. Head ringing, he fumbled his way up the slippery ratlines to the fighting top, where the frozen marines disinterestedly stared at him as they blew warmth into their cupped white hands.

ENSIGN slung over his shoulder, Gates paused for breath before continuing aloft. He had a clear view of *La Bellone*, and was surprised at the great number of men on her weatherdeck. She was obviously prepared to board, once resistance slackened on the *Havoc*. Fascinated, he watched her side spit streaks of flame that flowered into a cloud of smoke. The sun, to the east of the *Havoc*, sparkled on polished metal soaring to the apex of trajectory. He was able to follow the iron curving down toward the *Havoc*, and suppressed an urge to cry out the moment before the salvo struck. He felt the ship quiver from a series of heavy blows.

Thankful that the French were not firing for the rigging, he hastened up to the main royal, where, beaten by the wind, he nailed the *Havoc's* colors. The cold passed into a sensation of heat, and he knew his hands and face were frozen. His descent was agony. He had to watch his hands, and consciously clutch each ratline, for he was unable to tell by touch if he had a secure grip.

At the fighting top, he rested until he had the courage to risk his life on the rimy shrouds, whose plane would bring him out over the side of the ship before he reached the bulwark. He thought of asking the marines to send him down on the boatswain's chair they had rigged for their casualties, but he did not dare to be ignominiously lowered away like a bundle of faggots.

He chose the lee shrouds for the final stage of his journey. Fortunately, the sea was not too rough, and the *Havoc*, with all of her furniture sent below, was fairly stable, so her roll did not swing him far out over the gray water. He did not look down, for it little mattered to him whether he fell into the sea or on deck; the fall would kill him in either case.

He forgot everything in a struggle to concentrate upon each step of his descent, knowing that one slip would be his last. With great willpower, he ignored the ruination of his hands, which seemed to be ablaze. The wind pierced his heavy clothes and knifed into his flesh. He was dazed when the bulwark appeared below him, clinging to the shrouds until he realized that he had to make the deck by himself, for all hands were concerned with the battle.

He waited for the ship to roll to her engaged side, and with the valor of desperation, leaped for the deck. Numbly, he watched the frosty planks spring to meet him, and crashed into unconsciousness on his face.

Swimming out of a sea of pain, he opened his eyes. He was flat on his chest, arms spread. He guessed he had taken the shock of his fall on his right leg, for it was far warmer than his left, as he dragged himself to his knees. The quarterdeck guns fired. He glanced aft. The captain was placidly standing by the helm, intent upon *La Bellone*.

Gates forced himself erect, and was knocked flat by a pitch of the ship. Grimly, he hauled himself up again, and continued on his way. He was too chilled and hurt to do more than marvel dully that he still lived, and wanted nothing more than to be sent below to the warm orlop, where the surgeon awaited the shattered bodies. He had one purpose in mind, to tell the captain about the concentration of boarders on *La Bellone* and then go below.

He glanced at the Frenchman. His tortured brain estimated that the range had closed considerably, but he harshly told himself he might be deluded, and even if *La Bellone* were coming in, it was not his worry.

Abruptly, however, he had cause to change his mind.

Before his shocked eyes, the French felled the captain. A shot broke through the flimsy scantling of the quarterdeck and, avoiding the spray of wood, the captain ducked too quickly, lost his footing, and struck his head against a spoke of the wheel. While wounded men kicked in agony on the quarterdeck, the *Havoc* sailed on without a master.

Gates managed to reach his stunned commander, whose handsome face was ashen beneath the blood from a long gash.

"Steady as you go," Gates said sharply to the quartermasters who apathetically gazed down at their groaning leader.

Cruik fired another broadside, nearly deafening him with muzzle blast.

He took a deep breath. "Inform Mr. Cruik," he ordered a midshipman, and turned his attention to the Frenchman.

He had no time for himself. *La Bellone* was almost within musket shot. He knew something had to be done, and that before the first lieutenant could assume command. The *Havoc* had sustained terrific damage to her hull and crew, and now the terrible carronades commenced a slaughter with canister. A few broadsides of such withering destruction, and *La Bellone* could grapple and board without resistance.

Gates grunted involuntarily as a musketball drove into his shoulder. Men dropped all around him. The broadside had been fired high, which was all that saved those on the *Havoc's* weatherdeck from utter annihilation. Gates knew he had less than three minutes to get out of range of these guns, unless the French could reload faster.

He made his decision.

"Stand by the starboard battery!" he cried through the captain's trumpet.

The well-disciplined crew automatically echoed the command from the quarterdeck, and abandoned the port battery without question. Below, Mr. Cruik was attempting to understand the excited screams of an overwrought midshipman.

GATES threw a look at *La Bellone*, whose side was silent as her commander prepared another devastating salvo. He had the choice of putting the helm up or down. If he put the helm down, he would sign the death warrant for all hands in the *Havoc*, for *La Bellone* would be certain to hold her fire until her turning opponent had completely uncovered her stern. If he put the helm up and sailed into the wind, the *Havoc* might carry enough way to put her starboard battery in position to rake the Frenchman.

It was a delicate piece of seamanship, calling for a knowledge of the *Havoc's* sailing qualities which could only be expected from her captain. In such weather, sail could not be doused quickly enough to guarantee that the *Havoc* would travel the required distance into the teeth of the stiff offshore breeze. And if the Frenchman were wary, and took *La Bellone* aback, the *Havoc* might well smash into his side, which would place the English precisely where he wanted them, at the mercy of his boarders.

Numbly, instinctively, Gates had made the choice when he passed the word to stand by the starboard battery.

"Hard aweather!" he shouted at the quartermasters.

They gaped in astonishment. Cursing madly, Gates sprang at the wheel. "Hard aweather, damn you!" he screamed, clawing weakly at the helm.

Cowed by his frenzy, the quartermaster spun the spokes. Petulantly, the *Havoc* obeyed her rudder, slowly, then rapidly, swinging her bow toward *La Bellone*. Gates then cried to the seamen at the braces to furl sail.

Below, Cruik, at last comprehending the midshipman's message, had his foot on the ladder, when Prowse pointed out to him that the *Havoc* was turning. The first lieutenant threw away seniority. Gates had taken a step which was irrevocable, and Cruik determined to back up the decision with the most deadly broadside the *Havoc* had ever delivered. He remained below at his station, watching for the graceful hull of *La Bellone* to appear in the starboard gunports.

French captains, always of noble birth, insisted upon privileges sensibly denied their English counterparts. The great cabin in a French frigate was invariably a luxurious place to live, and was characterized by a tasteful expanse of exquisitely leaded windows stretched completely across the stern. This made the entire structure of the ship's gundeck peculiarly vulnerable to raking.

Holding his breath, Cruik strained his eyes for the first glimpse of *La Bellone's* artistically carved stern, and permitted himself the pleasure of an ironic smile as he reflected that Gates had certainly assumed a Herculean measure of responsibility for a youngster who had rejected the small burden of a split watch.

Perhaps because the move was a desperate gamble and failure meant certain defeat, the French captain failed to anticipate it, and thus was unable to take his sails aback in time. His reaction checked *La Bellone's* way, but only shortened the range for Cruik's imminent broadside.

The *Havoc* justified Gates, and gallantly staggered far enough for Cruik to end the fight. As the *Havoc* slowly drifted by the Frenchman's counter, almost within grenade distance, Cruik methodically fired each gun as its muzzle trained on the naked windows. Alternating double shot with canister, Cruik was certain when his last gun fired that there was no need to reload, even though *La Bellone* steadily sailed away.

Gates made the *Havoc* fall off, sailed close to the wind to assume the weather, and began to spread a full suit of canvas to overtake their opponent. He passed the word to stand by the mangled port battery, intending at the favorable moment to turn to starboard and once against cross *La Bellone's* counter.

His pursuit was needless. *La Bellone* struck her colors.

As the lilies of France fluttered down, Gates was reminded of his hurts, and yielded to their pain. When Cruik came topside, the *Havoc's* youngest lieutenant was sprawled alongside his captain. The men who carried both below were equally tender to each.

The following week, when Lieutenant Harry Larchmont Gates was able to return to England for sick leave, he went over the side with full honors, and the understanding that the *Havoc* would sail short in her complement of officers until he was able to resume his duties.

At the foot of the brow leading to the dock, he was smartly saluted by a marine sentry. In reply, Mr. Gates touched a bandaged hand to his hat. He started to walk on, then hesitated. "That sword strap could do with a bit of cleaning," he said sharply.

"Yes, sir," the marine replied, cheerfully. "Sorry, sir."

Lieutenant Harry Larchmont Gates walked stiffly to his waiting carriage, unaware that the marine had been tempted to retort that there was a wee tarnish to his own gold.

VANISHING ISLANDS

By VINCENT H. GADDIS

A Fact Story

DECORATION BY ROGER L. THOMAS

IT WAS high noon on a summer day in the year 1928 when the captain of a 20,000-ton round-the-world tourist ship mounted the bridge of the vessel to get his bearings. At his side were two officers of the British Naval Reserve. Placing his sextant to his eye, the captain made his determinations and turned to consult his nautical tables and charts. Suddenly his eyes widened with astonishment.

Working independently, the two naval officers checked the ship's position. Then all three men again made their calculations. There could be no doubt about their results. Bewildered, they glanced at the empty spinning horizons around the slowly moving vessel. The captain made his way to the radio room and the news was flashed to the world.

Easter Island had vanished! The strange little island of the southeast Pacific where the huge stone gods of a mysterious and prehistoric people gaze eternally at the sea was gone. The enigma of Easter and its giants of hoary antiquity had been covered by the waves of the world's greatest ocean.

A gunboat was sent from Valparaiso, Chile, to investigate the report. Ten days later the island was sighted. It was at its usual latitude and longitude. The ancient gods were intact —still brooding over blue infinity. There had been no earthquake, no tidal wave. The peak of Rano Raraku still rose 12,000 feet above the floor of the sea. Its position was unchanged. The crew of the gunboat shook their heads and returned home.

The report of the tourist ship was not

unique; it only deepened the mystery of an area where phantom islands have been reported for almost 300 years. Moreover, mariners report that the magnetic compass is erratic in this district, its variation increasing two minutes annually. Despite the exploration of scientific research vessels, the problem of the southeast Pacific remains unsolved.

Back in 1687 the English pirate, Davis, while crossing the Pacific bound for England, discovered an island with a "long sandy beach and coconut palms." The location was given as latitude 27 degrees south, 5000 miles west of the South American coast. Another island with high peaks was observed about twelve leagues away to the west. Davis was in a hurry and he decided not to land. He reported his discovery upon his arrival in England, and for fifty years the charts of the sea showed the location of "Davis Land."

Then the island vanished. No one could find it. While searching for it in 1722, the Dutch admiral, Roggeween, discovered Easter Island on Easter Sunday and gave the weird island its name. The admiral, however, stated that the island could not be Davis Land. There is no land for a thousand miles around Easter Island, except for the rocks of Sala-y-Gomez —250 miles to the east.

In 1802 Captain Gwyn reported that the rocks of Sala-y-Gomez had been incorrectly charted. The island, he said, was not at its stated location. He had rediscovered it about 300 miles west and fifty miles south of Easter Island. Mariners started a search. Sala-y-Gomez was found in its previously stated position, and there was no trace of an island in the location given by Captain Gwyn.

TWO years before the Gwyn report an American whaler under the command of Captain Swain sighted an island about 1,800 miles west by south of Cape Horn. Latitudes in those days could be accurately computed, but exact longitudes were still largely determined with chronometers whose rates did not change greatly over long periods of time. The island was described as being about eight miles long, two or three miles wide, and about eighty feet in height. It was covered with ice and snow, and animal life was abundant.

Dougherty Island, as it was later named, was again sighted a few years later by Gardiner and Macy, whaler captains. Macy described the water around the islands as "dark-colored and containing much rockweed or kelp." No attempts were made to land. Then in 1830 two American vessels set out to confirm the island's position and explore it, but they were unable to find it. In 1841 Captain Dougherty, another whaling captain, passed it at 300 yards and kept it in sight for the better part of a day. He obtained a good determination of its location and reported a detailed description of its appearance.

Several years later Captain Keates confirmed Dougherty's location and description, and his chronometer later was found to be in error less than a quarter of a mile. Captains Whitson, in 1885, and Stannard, in 1886 and again in 1890, sighted the island; Stannard kept the island in view for three days. Finally, in 1893, a Captain White, of New Zealand, sailed around the island, and his description tallied closely with those of previous navigators. Then the island vanished.

The *Rimutaka*, a research vessel, searched in 1894, 1900, 1907 and 1910 in fine weather without success. Captain Scott, of Antarctic fame, passed over the reported position of the island and made soundings of three miles where so many previous navigators had observed land. Other research vessels explored the area in 1910, 1915, 1930 and 1931. The yacht *Discovery* reported soundings of 14,838 feet at the island's reported position. In 1932 the island was removed from American navigation charts.

While the century-long controversy over Dougherty Island was in full swing, Captain Pinocchio, in 1879, announced his discovery of Podesta Island, named after his ship. Its location was given as 870 miles due west of Valparaiso, Chile. This position is a lonely area of the sea, far from shipping lanes. The Italian captain stated that the island was oval in shape, about three-quarters of a mile in circumference, and forty feet high. The Italian Hydrographic Office claimed that the captain's navigation could not have been in error more than a few miles. The island has not been found since the original report, and it was removed from charts in 1935.

Then in 1912 the steamer *Glewalon*, a large English vessel, came into Valparaiso with the news that land had been sighted close to the South American coast and not far from Easter Island. Calculations had been checked by all officers on board, and harbor authorities checked their results. Apparently a new island had arisen from the sea, but the training ship *Baquedano* searched for the new land for three weeks without success. No soundings made were shallower than 10,000 feet.

How are such occurrences possible? Only recently R. T. Gould, retired Lieutenant-Commander of the British Royal Navy, in referring to phantom islands, wrote: "Until we know considerably more about the geography of our planet than we do now, there will always be doubtful islands distinguished on the Admiralty charts by the sceptical affix *E. D.* (existence doubtful) or *P. D.* (position doubtful). It may seem curious, in these days of

over-civilization, that we should still be in this state of uncertainty. But, in sober fact, we still know less about the round world than is generally supposed, and a small departure from the beaten track may still, in certain parts of the great oceans, and even nearer home, transform the ordinary mariner into a discoverer." Gould then pointed out the fact that while seamen in all ages have been able to determine latitude by means of astronomical observations, the finding of longitude at sea remained an unsolved problem until the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Three-fourths of the earth's surface is covered with water, and the ship lanes of commerce are quite definite. Unexplored and little-known areas of the seas exist in many places. The reader who sees a nautical chart for the first time will be astonished at the number of spots marked *E. D.* or *P. D.* Each year several hundred rocks, shoals and reefs are reported at various positions; some are confirmed later, others are never observed again.

ALTHOUGH most of the phantom islands discussed in this article have been reported in deep areas of the oceans, there are other islands in more shallow regions that rise and fall with the years. Volcanic jack-in-the-box islands include Bogoslav near Alaska and Falcon in the Tonga group. Falcon, for example, was born in 1885 when an eruption raised a shoal 290 feet above sea level. In 1898 the island disappeared, then, slowly, by sea action, it was reborn, and came to the surface in 1927. Today the island is a hundred feet in height. Other islands have sunk or been blown to pieces by volcanic action. Expedition Island is now under forty-two feet of water. Torca, a once well-populated island in the Indian Ocean, vanished in flame and explosion in 1683.

Several hundred phantom islands have been reported in the past century since navigation has become a more or less exact science. While some of these islands may well have been mirages, others were landed upon. Most of the reports are highly trustworthy, but surveying and exploring ships have been unable to find them. In 1858 the United States government listed over a dozen islands in the South Pacific as "pertaining to the United States under the act of August 18, 1856." Not a one of these islands has ever been definitely located.

Mysterious factors in navigational calculations caused the Solomon Islands, so important in the early part of the Pacific war, to be lost for two centuries. The Solomons were first discovered in 1567. For 200 years seamen, unable to find them, regarded the first report as false. Finally, in 1767, they were rediscovered.

More startling is the story of Bouvet Island. It was first discovered 200 years ago, in 1739, by the French explorer Lozier-Bouvet. It was covered with ice and snow, and its position was given as 1,500 miles southwest of the Cape of Good Hope in the South Atlantic. For a century many expert navigators like Cook and Ross searched for it without success. However, in 1822, an American whaler claimed to have landed on it. The British Admiralty sent out two expeditions to search for the island. When they both returned announcing failure, the island was removed from all charts in 1845. Then in 1893 the island was again reported—and in the same position as given 154 years before. More reports followed, all giving the same location. After American and German scientific vessels confirmed the location in 1916 and 1926, the island was again placed on charts in 1927.

Other phantom islands in the South Atlantic include the Auroras, scene of Edgar Allen Poe's story *Arthur Pym*, and Saxemberg. The Auroras, located halfway between the Falklands and South Georgia, were first reported in 1762. They were said to be inhabited. Five additional reports followed, and in 1794 a Spanish surveying ship definitely fixed their position. Detailed maps of the three islands were made. But all searches conducted since have resulted in failure, and the sea is deep in this area. Saxemberg is said to be 420 miles northwest of Tristan da Cunha. It was reported in 1670, 1804 and 1816. Five years later it could not be found. Soundings in the area have revealed a depth of over two miles.

But it is the Pacific ocean that has furnished us the longest list of lost islands. Over a century ago Father Santa Clara, at the Rosario Mission near St. Francis Bay in California, told Captain C. Morrell of the St. Vincent Islands. Placed in the heart of South Pacific Oceania, the missionary priest said they were inhabited, well-wooded and high, with good harbors. They were first found by Antonio Martinus in 1789 while on a passage from Panama to China. Captain Morrell made his search in 1825, but all he found was discolored water 120 fathoms deep.

Another perfect island, if it could be found, for escapists from civilization is Hunter Island. It was discovered in 1823 by Captain Hunter of the *Donna Carmelita* not far from Niafou, or "tin can" island. It is said to be well cultivated by highly-developed Polynesians who have the practice of amputating the little finger of the left hand at the second joint.

There are many other missing islands on record. And considering the navigational errors of the past and the infrequent exploration of areas removed from the usual travel lanes, there are many rediscoveries that will be made in future years.

THE LORD

By
BYRON W.
DALRYMPLE

ILLUSTRATED BY EARL EUGENE MAYAN

ALL his life my Uncle Ax had wanted one thing he didn't have, and it was something the Lord couldn't entirely give him. When we came to Slashing Creek, though, he got it, along with the worst licking he ever had.

"The Lord," Uncle Ax said, "worketh in strange ways."

He was sure right, but he underestimated the Lord. He didn't realize *how* strange.

Young Theron McDonough gave him the licking. I couldn't help liking Theron—no more than could Cousin Mary. Everybody liked Theron, but they were all agin my Uncle Ax. That is, up until the Lord smote Theron and Uncle Ax found what he wanted. It was a caution, Aunt Ardelia said, how the Lord smitin' a body could change folks.

Uncle Ax was an evangelist. We went from place to place, because, he said, "The Devil is

AND UNCLE AX

Uncle Ax leaped atop the anvil, into the light from the glowing forge

a hog in a beech woods, looking constant for a new rooting place."

We'd take some cleared land, farm out the summer, fight the Devil all winter. Then we'd move. Trouble was, Uncle Ax got licked more than the Devil. He'd been sad and severe, long as I'd lived with him and Aunt Ardelia and Cousin Mary.

Slashing Creek hadn't a church, only saloons, a store, a blacksmith shop. Log drives came down the creek, out of Michigan's piney woods, and big, rough men came with them. Slashing Creek, Uncle Ax said, was "a roistering place of Satan." He'd been planning his attack a long time.

The second week, he arranged a revival meeting at the blacksmith shop. After that, I began to see what was wrong with Uncle Ax, how he had always wanted this thing he didn't have. I couldn't see how he was ever going to get it, but I guess I underestimated the Lord, too.

Uncle Ax wouldn't let Aunt Ardelia and Cousin Mary attend the meeting. He suspected there wouldn't be any other womenfolks there. But he said, "Danny, you're twelve, and you might as well learn about the Devil." He was getting ready to go.

Sometimes seemed like we had an awful lot of religion, so I could hardly wait, secretly hoping I'd hear some swearing, or see somebody drunk. But I kept my face solemn. I got my stocking cap and marched slow and respectful to the door.

"I'll put the yoke on Buck and Broad," I said.

Uncle Ax said, "Let us kneel and pray for success at the meeting."

I acted like I hadn't heard. I ran to the barn and jumped up and clicked my heels three times. "C'mon, Buck, you ole skinflint ox!" I hollered. "Maybe," I thought, "Theron McDonough will come to the meeting. Maybe there'll even be a fight."

We'd heard about Theron, before ever we came to Slashing Creek. He had a mighty reputation as a fighter. The day we'd drove in, he was coming out of the store, lugging a hundred of salt like it was five pounds of meal. He stopped and looked us over. He was a strapping, fiery-haired young fellow, with laughing eyes the color of Aunt Ardelia's blue mixing bowl.

Cousin Mary sat on his side of the ox cart. She was just turned twenty that spring. Theron's mouth opened. His big hands forgot the salt. The bag fell and busted. He didn't even seem to notice.

Cousin Mary's mouth was pursed up like a ripe wild strawberry, like she was trying not to smile. She sure looked pretty. Even I could see that.

Theron walked toward us, his tanned face crinkled in a grin. "Girlie," he said, not acting like the rest of us were even there, "it purely ain't true. Nobody's *that* pretty!"

Cousin Mary's long, dark lashes instantly covered her morning-glory eyes. "My name's Theron McDonough, girlie," he wheedled. "What's yours?"

Uncle Ax said sternly, "Buck! Broad!" and cracked the whip.

The oxen started to move. The cart wheel creaked. Suddenly Theron caught Cousin Mary by the arms, lifted her. He held her above him, like she was a wheat straw, threw back his head, laughing, sun glinting on his red hair and in his blue eyes—then planted a kiss square on her mouth and set her back, all so quick the wheel hadn't time to creak again.

Uncle Ax's face was blood red, but he looked straight ahead, muttering something about "the ways of the Devil," and put the lash to the oxen. Cousin Mary kept her head bowed, twisting her hands in her lap all the way home.

From that day there was a change came over her. She took more time, mornings, fixing her brown curls tight as tendrils on our backporch ivy vine. She'd let her oatmeal get cold, and wouldn't know Aunt Ardelia had told her to do dishes. I figured she was thinking about Theron.

I'd been thinking about him, too, hoping I'd grow up strong as him, with a reputation like his. I punched old Broad in the belly, now, playing I was a fighter. After while Uncle Ax came and climbed into the cart.

HE prayed all the way to town. I sat straight and solemn, scared to chirp at Buck and Broad for fear I'd bust out hollering, I was that happy to be going to the first meeting in the worst place we'd ever been.

The blacksmith shop was jammed. There was laughing, swearing, smell of burnt hoof parings and whiskey. The lumberjacks and clearing-farmers didn't look like they'd come to get their souls saved. They were out for a lark, I figured, and to see what an evangelist was.

Uncle Ax strode in, ordering me sharply to stay by the door. Suddenly it wasn't exciting, like I'd pictured. I was scared. I kept my eyes glued to his back.

Uncle Ax was big, with shoulders wide as old Buck's horns. He had dark, kind eyes. Always seemed like they wanted to twinkle, only they were too sad. When he'd get preaching, his thick, black hair would fall across his brow, and his eyes would shoot fire. I liked to think his mouth wanted to smile, but you couldn't tell. It was hid beneath his gray-black beard.

The look of my Uncle Ax was strength itself. But when he spoke, he was different. Even though his voice was severe, his manner was mild as the orange-colored orioles nesting in our sheepnose apple tree.

He leaped atop the anvil, into the flickering light from the glowing forge and the lanterns.

He spread his big, quick hands. The place was quiet like by magic. Then someone knocked me aside, came swaggering in, shadows dancing over him. In his hand was a bottle. He threw back his head and laughed.

"I'll whip the Lord's man!" he shouted. It was Theron!

Somebody grabbed the bottle. A cheer went up—not like nobody was mad. Like they were having fun.

Uncle Ax boomed: "Help me whip the Devil, brother. The Lord needs *your* strength on His side." But men were milling around, clearing a space.

They shouted: "Git down, evangelist, and meet McDonough!"

"Best rough-and-tumble man this side of Canady!"

"Hell with the Devil, let's see you fight McDonough!"

Theron's blue eyes twinkled. You could see he liked to fight for fun. I couldn't help admirin' the look of him, but my knees were shaking and I couldn't swallow. Uncle Ax got down. There was a cheer.

"Axton O'Donnel, the Lord's man!"

"Theron McDonough, the Devil's man!"

"Bully boys! Go it!"

Theron rushed forward. Uncle Ax raised his hands to silence the crowd. He opened his mouth to speak words of peace—and Theron knocked him flat.

He lay stunned, his right eye beginning to close. Theron stood over him, grinning, blue eyes shining kind of wild. I ran and grabbed his leg, yelling, "Leave my Uncle Ax alone!"

Uncle Ax was getting up, but Theron paid no mind. He looked down at me. "Dang ye, lad," he laughed, "ye've more spunk than the big 'un!"

I wanted to hate him. But I was all mixed up. I thought I was going to grin and throw out my chest.

Uncle Ax stood before us now, head up, looking straight at Theron with his good left eye. Quietly he said, "Go outside, Danny." Then he quoted to Theron that Bible one about how you got to always turn the other cheek to them as hit you.

"No, Uncle Ax!" I yelled. "No! Hit him! Fight him!"

The crowd roared, wanting more. It was no use. Uncle Ax always got licked, every place we went. He raised his hands to the crowd. I guess Theron took it he had fight in him. Theron's left fist shot out, and down went Uncle Ax again.

"Well, man," Theron shouted, "there's the other cheek for ye!"

Uncle Ax didn't move. Theron gripped his hands above his head.

"Bully boy!"

"The Devil's man wins!"

WINCHESTER

batteries cut darkness *bullet-fast*

Don't go another night without the safety of a flashlight loaded with *fresh* long-lasting Winchester batteries. Snap the switch and these batteries spread a carpet of safety ahead of each step you take.

NIGHT TIRE TROUBLE

The 18-months' shelf-life of Winchester (No. 1511) flashlight batteries make them favorites with motorists. One writes—"We have had a lot of tire trouble in the past year. Synthetic tubes and worn out tires have a nasty habit of going flat at night—far from home and a service station. Ask my son what's handier than our flashlight then?"

Look for—and get—Winchester batteries. You'll find the Winchester Self-Service Cabinet wherever flashlights and batteries are sold. Winchester Repeating Arms Company, New Haven, Conn., Division of Olin Industries, Inc.

UNUSUAL LIGHTS THAT HAVE SERVED MAN . . . In Ancient Britain, to guard against night attacks by the savage Picts, the Celts always carried a Druid's torch. It was made of plaited cotton rags dipped in tallow or butter. Now you snap the switch, and light from your Winchester flashlight puts the darkness bullet-fast.
FLASHLIGHT
WINCHESTER
UNIT CELL
No. 1511
DATED HERE

DIVISION OF OLIN INDUSTRIES INC. WINCHESTER TRADE MARK BATTERIES

Make light of the dark *bullet-fast*

They were all yelling at once, while Uncle Ax crawled to his knees. I got hold of him, helped him up. Someone was trying to force a bottle between his lips, but I got him out and into the cart and whipped old Buck and Broad all the way home. He sat straight on the seat, silent. When we got home he said, "You'll have to help me, Danny, I can't see." He patted my head. "Don't be frightened, lad. Truly, the Lord worketh in strange ways."

I thought I was going to cry. "That might be, Uncle Ax," I said, "but I sure wisht He'd fight on your side for a change."

Suddenly his shoulders slumped. He looked beaten, ashamed before me. I helped him into the kitchen, wondering what he was thinking. I began to see something I'd never seen before.

ALL night I figured on it, and next morning, at breakfast, it all to once come to me, the whole thing. I kept staring at Uncle Ax' black eyes, thinking on it.

"Clean up your plate," Aunt Ardelia ordered. "Some day you'll chase a crow a mile for them vittles."

"Yes, mom," I said.

But I wasn't listening. Why, it was plain as blackstrap spilled on your Sunday britches why Uncle Ax had all his life wanted this one thing he didn't have. I'd of bet he wanted to be happy, just like other folks. He had aholt of the Lord's word and was wishing he could let go some.

You see, he took his Bible straight; but there was one thing had been left out of the Bible, the way I got figuring, and that was about how you got to help yourself some and not leave it all up to the Lord. Uncle Ax he was stubborn as Adam's off ox about the Bible, and it had him just plain confused. Yes, sir!

If he hewed to the Good Book, he couldn't hit nobody back. That would be revenge. When he didn't hit nobody back, nobody respected him, least of all, himself. This thing Uncle Ax wanted was self-respect—yes, sir—only he didn't want for the Lord to catch on. That would be vanity.

Poor Uncle Ax, he sits there silent, forking the sidemeat over slow. Here is Cousin Mary, letting her flapjacks get cold, primping her hair and dreaming—and Theron the one whipped her Pa! Aunt Ardelia, mouth set straight and thin, is ashamed, inside, of Uncle Ax. I just know she is. "Lord," I think, "you had better help Uncle Ax out. Here he can't look none of us in the eye, and I tell you something has got to be done."

Well, I guess either the Lord was up early that morning, and listening close, or else He had just been taking His own sweet time with things, because three days later He works about as strange as you ever hear tell.

It is the day they are raising Theron's new barn. All the Slashing Creek folks are there, women too. We can follow the whole affair, 'cause the menfolks are drunk and the wind is a gale, blowing our way.

It gets dark early and there is a terrible storm, lightning exploding in the woods, thunder rolling, wind lashing rain against the house. Once I sneak to the window and see a ball of fire shoot right along old Buck's horn.

Uncle Ax has worked up his nerve for another meeting, which is supposed to be tonight. The rain stops. We all get in the cart, Aunt Ardelia and Cousin Mary, too.

Aunt Ardelia is scared. "Why'nt you give it up, Ax?" she pleads.

Uncle Ax says sternly, "Is that what the Lord would do?" He puts the lash to Buck and Broad. The wind is knocking trees down, and it is pitch dark except for the lightning. Uncle Ax looks to see that his long, black raincoat is tucked in the cart. He takes his big, black hat off, so's the wind won't get it, and puts it under his coat.

I feel like something awful is going to happen—and sure enough, it does. As we get to Theron's clearing, we see pine-torch lights bobbing and we hear alarmed voices on the wind.

"Now what in tunket—" Aunt Ardelia says.

There is a big flash of lightning. We see a wild crowd of folks running around Theron's place.

"Something's happened," says Uncle Ax.

"Oh, my—oh—dear," Cousin Mary says. She throws both hands to her face.

Uncle Ax turns the oxen toward the clearing. "Now Ax," Aunt Ardelia snaps, "you're not going down there!"

"The Lord worketh in strange ways, Ardelia."

"Oh, dear."

Day-bright lightning flashes almost constant now, and we see a terrible thing. Theron's new barn is flat on the ground, busted all to smithers by the wind. He is out in the plowed field, and there is a big circle drawn around him in the mud. We can hear him yelling. It is something awful. He is daring the Lord to come down into that circle and fight it out with him over the barn!

"Lord have mercy on us," Aunt Ardelia wails. Cousin Mary is crying. I start to pray.

Uncle Ax leaps out. Little bunches of frightened women are hovering around Theron's house. Men are running back and forth, shouting. Somebody starts out into the field, toward Theron. Another man grabs him, shouts, "Leave him be! That crazy Irisher will kill you, man!"

The lightning slacks off. It is pitch dark, except for the wild dance of torch lights in the howling wind. I reach for Uncle Ax' hand. "Uncle Ax!" I yell. "UNCLE AX!" We have got separated. I can't find Aunt Ardelia, nor Cousin Mary. I am too scared to run. I start to cry.

SOME said afterwards that the lightning gave an awful flash and a tall, black-robed figure descended straight out of the clouds. Others said it had long, glaring-white wings which trailed flashes of lightning.

All I knew was, a scream, drowned by the crash of rolling thunder, came from the womenfolks. Then the wind seemed to stop dead. In the field, Theron lets out a yell of fright and pain. Seems like I hear the sound of the Lord beating him to death. He yells louder. There is a fierce rush of wind. Women are wailing, men shouting: "Get back! Back!"

I fall on my face and pray as loud as I can. Lightning cracks. I look up and glimpse Theron staggering toward the house. His face is dark with blood. Next flash, I see him fall.

"UNCLE AX! UNCLE AX!" I scream.

"What's wrong with you, boy!" Someone yanks me roughly to me feet. It is Uncle Ax.

"Theron—" I sob. "The Lord—" I point toward where he's lying.

Men are running toward him. Torches flicker over his limp body. "Don't touch him," someone shouts. "Get away! We'll all be killed!"

Uncle Ax strides forward, head high, thick black hair tossed by the wind. He stoops, lifts Theron in his arms, and carries him into the house.

After a little, folks steal in, pale as ghosts. I follow. In the dim lamplight I see Theron lying on the floor. His eyes are swelled big as puffballs in our meadow. They look black, red, green, purple—all to once. His nose doesn't look like a nose, and it is leaking blood. Big knots stand out on his head. The Lord has sure beat him something awful.

"Let us pray," Uncle Ax says.

Well, sir, you know, the greatest revival ever you hear tell of takes place right then and there. Theron comes to, and he testifies how it all was, how he dared the Lord and the Lord took him up. He is so scared he begs Uncle Ax on both knees to fix him up square with the Lord. Womenfolks are whimpering, crying, praying like sixty. Big, rough men are on their knees, faces white as milk beneath their beards.

I look at Uncle Ax. My eyes pop. Why, this isn't my Uncle Ax at all! His dark eyes aren't sad. They twinkle and shoot fire like they will bust out of his head for pure happiness. His mouth isn't sad. And his voice has changed. It is almost like he will laugh or jump up and down and click his heels any minute.

He is purely roaring religion at the folks, not begging, TELLING them! He grabs Theron by the front of the shirt. "You pray, young man!" he roars. Then like an after-thought, he says, "And next time you want to speak to my daughter, Mary, you come to me and ask like a gentleman! Hear me?"

Uncle Ax strides forward, head high, thick black hair tossed by the wind.

"Yes—sir," Theron murmurs, meek as a cottontail.

"Lord," I says to myself, "thanks a whole heap. Uncle Ax has finally got what he wanted. Yes sir, Lord, he sure has!"

The meeting finally ends. Everyone is quiet, thoughtful, scared. Uncle Ax moves among them, passing out blessings. They all look up like he is maybe the Lord his ownself. Cousin Mary is looking at Theron's mashed-up face with her eyes big, but her mouth has a little smile like in a trance.

He gazes long at her through his puffball eyes, and he sort of heaves a sigh. Just as we go out the door, he touches Uncle Ax' sleeve. "Mister O'Donnel," he says, timid as a chipmunk, "could I—maybe—come see ye—sometime?"

"Certainly, young man," Uncle Ax booms. There's nothing mild about him now. "I'm sure we'd *all* be glad to see you—wouldn't we, Mary?"

"Oh—father," Cousin Mary sighs. Her long lashes cover her morning-glory eyes. She bows her head.

Well, sir, going home I never would have believed it. All the way, Uncle Ax is singing. Aunt Ardelia says, "Law me, Ax, what's got into you? Here we been witness to a miracle, and you actin' the fool this way. For shame!" She hitches over on the seat and prays eighty rods without catching a breath.

The wind is over, but it starts to sprinkle. I put my hand on Uncle Ax' arm. Gosh, but I like him the way he is now. "Uncle Ax," I say, "you'd better fix to put on your coat and hat. It's raining."

"Why—er—" he says. He fidgets real nervous for a minute, like when he's forgot something important. "Oh, fiddlesticks, lad, rain won't hurt me."

Well, that might be, but I reach to get his coat, and then I draw my hand back and I sit there figuring all the rest of the way home. I don't even hear Aunt Ardelia tell me to get a pail of water, when we get there, I am figuring so hard. After everybody has finally gone to bed, I hear Uncle Ax out in the kitchen. I get up and go out there. He is putting salve on his knuckles.

"What you doing that for, Uncle Ax?" I say.

He grins at me and winks his twinkling eyes. "Oh, lad," he says, "I guess that plagu-ed ox yoke skinned my hand."

"How come it skinned *both*, Uncle Ax?"

"Get to bed, lad," he says.

I start. Then I turn around and say real quiet, "Uncle Ax, your big black hat and raincoat wasn't in the cart."

He comes over and puts his big hands on my shoulders. "Danny," he says, "you know, the Lord *does* work in strange ways." Then he kind of fidgets and coughs. "Sometimes probably He'd rather we'd *think* about it, but not *talk* much. It was the wind, lad. It must have blown the hat and coat out of the cart—don't you think?" There is the strangest little twinkle in his dark eyes, and I think maybe his mouth is trying to grin, beneath his beard.

Well, that might be. Maybe 'twas the wind. I nodded my head, and went back and crawled into bed; but what I couldn't figure out was, how come they were hanging in the back woodshed when I got up at daylight next morning, all mud like out of the field where the Lord smote Theron? And where did the little spots of dry blood come from?

THE POCKET OF Wun Tu Foo

A "Blue Pencil Club" Story

By FRANKLIN GREGORY

THE boss threw some copy in his wire basket and yelled, "Boy!" Then he looked over at me and said, "Larry, c'mere."

I knew what was coming. He was a persistent lug, and he'd been hounding me for a month now. It was his way, and I suppose that's why he was city editor. He'd hound the devil out of you and finally you'd get the story for him. He finally got this story, too—only he never printed it. I think he believed it. I was never quite sure.

I walked up to the desk.

"They got a new stiff from Catharine Street over at the morgue," he said.

"I heard."

"You got any new leads?"

I said, "No."

"Well, go out and get some," he said.

I was on the South Philly district then, and there had been an epidemic of mysterious deaths among the Italians in the neighborhood of Fourth and Catharine Streets, down near the water front. A fellow would be walking around full of vim and vigor one minute, and the next he'd keel over dead.

It had the Department of Public Health in a dither because they couldn't figure out what was wrong. They wouldn't issue any formal statement; they didn't want to frighten the public. At least, that's what they claimed when you'd pin them down in an off-the-record session. So they got in cahoots with the coroner and the death certificates showed heart disease. But that wasn't it at all. I know because I knew Doc Turner, the coroner's physician who did the posts.

Doc was a right guy, and Lee Bailey and I had been trying to get him to spring with a public statement of some kind ever since the corpses had started piling up. Lee had the same beat for the opposition, and we worked the district together—six at night to three in the morning.

But Doc wouldn't go over the coroner's head, and I can't say I blamed him. He was a political appointee and he'd have lost his job.

On the other hand, without some sort of statement, there wasn't any story. The town's got eight thousand deaths from diseases of the heart every year and who were we to say that the coroner was lying about a couple of dozen of them? Even though we knew it, we couldn't prove it.

I went over to the morgue.

"I hear you got a new stiff," I said to Doc.

Doc got out a death certificate and I read it: *Vittorio Cortese . . . heart disease.*

"Who you think you're kidding?" I asked. "What happened?"

"He was walking along South Third Street this afternoon," Doc says. "He'd just gotten off work and was a couple of doors from his house when he collapsed."

"Anybody see him?"

Doc gave me the names of a couple of fellows who worked in a South Philly shoe factory with Cortese.

"You already done the post?" I asked.

Doc nodded.

"Same as the others?" I asked. "Nothing?"

Doc nodded again.

"Let's take a look," I said.

Doc showed me the body. It was of a husky, young-looking guy. And I swear, the mere sight of him gave me the creeps. I couldn't say why. God knows, I've seen my share of stiffs. I've seen 'em smashed up by trains, and I've seen 'em riddled by machine gun bullets. I've seen their elongated necks after they've hanged themselves, and I've seen their heads blown off, and I've seen 'em fat and bloated and stinking after they've been dragged out of the Delaware.

But this one and those others from the same neighborhood—they made me shudder.

"That's number twenty-five, isn't it?" I said.

"Twenty-six," Doc said.

I kept staring at the body, trying to figure out what gave me such a funny feeling. It was as if there were an aura of something familiar missing, if such a thing could be. Like he had an ear or an arm gone, or something like that. Only everything was in its proper place.

"Guys just don't croak from nothing," I said.

"This one did," Doc said. He was staring at the body, too, with speculation.

I MET Lee Bailey a little later down at the Fourth Street and Snyder Avenue police station. Like I said, we worked the district together. Half the time we toured the beat in the same car, and if too many things started happening at the same time—say a three-alarmer at one end of the district and a murder at the other—I'd take one and he'd cover the other and afterwards we'd get together and swap what we had. That way neither of us would get licked, both papers were covered, and everybody was happy.

We went around to interview the two guys who were with Cortese when he dropped dead. They lived on Fitzwater Street near Fifth, not far from Cortese's home. Only one of them, a fellow named Mike Camara, could talk English. We found him in his tiny brick bandbox house—what they call in Philly a Father, Son and Holy Ghost, three stories, with one tiny room on top of the other.

"We stopped at the taproom on the corner," Camara said. "The three of us. Just a coupla beers, that's all. Then we was walking along the street, and—*zoop!* Vittorio, he puts both his mitts up to his throat and starts fighting."

"Fighting?" asked Lee.

"Y'know, like somebody was tryin' to choke him and he was tryin' to fight him off. Only there wasn't nobody, see? Just me on one side and Clemento on the other. Vittorio starts to gag. His tongue hangs out and his eyes start popping, and then he falls down."

Lee looked at me.

"You saw the body," he said. "Any marks around the throat?"

"No," I said. And we were both thinking the same thing: that Cortese's death happened just about the way the others had. People who had been with them when they croaked all said they looked like they were being choked to death. And some of them thought they were having a fit.

As we were walking away from Camara's house, Lee said, "It sounds like diphtheria to me. They hadn't ought to send police reporters out on something like this. They ought to put their science editors to work for a change."

"Only it isn't diphtheria," I said. "And it isn't anything else that's in the book. Turner's had half the Medical Society buzzing around those stiffs, and they can't get to first base."

"A bunch of quacks," Lee said. "They ought to go back to school."

There was a raid on a numbers bank that night, and a little later a still blew up at one of the oil refineries over on the Schuylkill and a couple of men were burned to death. And what with a holdup or two and the usual number of hit-run accidents, we were pretty busy until about two o'clock. Finally, Lee and I met at the Spaghetti House.

I don't know whether you knew the Spaghetti House. It was just off Catharine Street on Third. It wasn't much of a joint and it ran all night. But it served good steaks and it had good Italian food, too. The Italians gave it quite a play. There were Italian cooks and Italian waiters, but the owner was a Chink. His name was Wun Tu Foo.

I can't describe him very well. Most Chinamen look alike to me. But he was a little guy, with small, quick hands, I remember that well enough. And people said he came from Malaya. He was affable enough. He had a lot of dough and drove a big sixteen-cylinder Cad. He had three or four sidelines besides the restaurant—a little loan business, some real estate, insurance, stuff like that. He was a nut on insurance, always trying to get Lee and me to take out a policy.

But the main attraction for me at the Spaghetti House was the waitress. Her name was Maria Di Stasio. She was as cool and pretty as a glass of wine; you know, dark-haired, black-eyed, dainty. She was only

eighteen, and the first time I laid eyes on her I fell for her like the proverbial ton of bricks. She got off duty at three o'clock and I'd usually stop by and drive her home. Sometimes Lee would come with us and we'd stop somewhere for a drink.

They were pretty busy this night. Lee and I ordered steaks and a pitcher of beer and sat at a corner table talking. Wun Tu Foo sat in his cashier's cage near the door, smoking a long pipe. His dark yellow face was bland, expressionless, but his eyes moved slowly. You knew at once that he was seeing everything that went on in the place.

"The trouble is," Lee said, smearing the A-1 on his steak, "these stiffs don't have anything in common."

" 'Death is a black camel, which kneels at the gates of all,' " I quoted. "They're all dead, aren't they? That ought to be enough of a common denominator for you."

"I don't mean that," Lee said.

"And they all looked like they were choking to death," I added. "And they all lived in the same neighborhood and they were all poor as church mice."

"I don't mean that, either," Lee said. "I mean —look! They worked different places at different trades, hung out in different saloons, belonged to different societies. Hell! Most of them didn't even know each other. And they weren't all Italians, either. Some of them were Sicilians."

He was right. We'd already done a pretty thorough job of checking their backgrounds.

"They were all pretty young, though," I said. "In their twenties and thirties."

WHEN the crowd cleared out and Maria got through her work, she and Lee and I got in my car and drove up to the Blue Pencil Club, the newspapermen's hangout. Lee and I were still talking about the case when Joe, the steward, brought the drinks to our table.

"Isn't it strange," Maria said, "that all of these people were our regular customers? Why, Mr. Cortese was in the restaurant just last night. I didn't wait on him, though. The boss wanted to."

I said Maria was a darn pretty girl. But you notice I didn't say what else she had above the neck. Well—I don't suppose you could expect a good-looking doll to have everything. Lee gave me a quick glance, and we were both thinking the same thing. About five days before Cortese had died, there'd been another death—a chicken dealer named Pisticci.

Lee said casually, "Was Pisticci in the night before he croaked?"

Maria thought back. "Why—yes," she said. "Come to think of it, he was."

"Did Wun Tu Foo wait on him?"

"He did that night—but usually I did," she said.

She still didn't see any connection, and we let the matter ride. We didn't want to get her upset. And we particularly didn't want her to be talking to anybody else. We were thinking furiously, of course, but we managed to talk about other things. But all of a sudden, Maria said, "You know, the boss sold Mr. Pisticci an insurance policy just before he died. Wasn't that lucky for Mr. Pisticci?"

Lee nearly upset his drink. It was about all we could do to keep from talking about it until we took Maria home. After we let her off, I drove Lee over to his apartment and we sat in the car talking.

Of course, the only conclusion we could reach was that Wun Tu Foo was somehow responsible for those deaths; that somehow he made a profit out of it.

The arsenic murder-for-insurance racket was still recent history. It was like Lee said: "Load a guy up with insurance, then knock him off and collect."

"But why didn't Doc Turner get wise?" I asked. "He did the autopsies."

"If you don't know what you're looking for, you might overlook arsenic," Lee suggested.

"That's out," I said. "Doc told me he made every test for every poison he ever heard of."

"Some Oriental poison that doesn't show up under the usual tests . . ." mused Lee.

"You've been reading too many comic books," I laughed. But the more I thought of it, the more it seemed that it had to be that way. And why not? Asia was old before Europe was born. And couldn't the Orientals have cooked up a fantastic poison that's been a pretty closely held secret? All right, laugh. But don't forget that our own scientists cooked up the atomic bomb—and most of us don't know what it's all about yet.

"My God!" Lee said. "Remember how he tried to sell that insurance to us?"

Wun Tu Foo was agent in his neighborhood for the Commercial-Philadelphia Mutual Life and the next day Lee and I went down to their home office on Walnut Street. We had the list of the twenty-six guys who'd croaked.

I was pretty well acquainted with George Baldwin, one of the vice-presidents, and we hunted him up. He had an office pretty high in the building, overlooking Independence Hall. We told him what we wanted to know—how many of these people were insured by the Commercial-Philadelphia, for how much, and who the beneficiary was.

It was confidential information, of course, and Baldwin was hesitant. But we explained the set-up and he finally agreed to play. He buzzed for his secretary, and the wheels started turning. About fifteen minutes later the secre-

ILLUSTRATED BY
J. CAMPBELL FARREN

tary came back and handed Baldwin a memo. He glanced at it and frowned.

"I'm sorry," he said. "We didn't issue a policy on any one of them."

Lee looked at me, and I looked at Lee. His expression said: "Now who's screwy?"

WELL, things went along for a few days. And then one night Lee and Maria and I were in the Blue Pencil Club again, and we'd invited her brother, Tony, along, too. We were sitting there, gabbing, and after a while, Maria asked, "Did you get fixed up on the insurance, Tony?"

Tony grinned. He was a big fellow, with powerful shoulders, one of the best-looking Italians I've ever seen. He was a truck driver, and we'd seen him around the Spaghetti House occasionally.

"Yeah," Tony replied. "Paid the first premium. It came out of the loan."

I could feel Lee looking at me. He asked, casually, "Commercial-Philadelphia?"

"Naw," Tony said. "That company's no good. Wun Tu Foo's their agent down in our neighborhood, but even he says it's no good. He brought an agent for a *good* company around—Delaware-Florida Life."

I could feel Lee looking at me again. Then he said, "Who's the beneficiary? Maria?"

Tony grinned sheepishly.

"Naw," he said. "You see, I owe Wun Tu Foo a few hundred bucks, so he is. I don't even

know how much it's for . . . Only fair, huh?"

And there it was! There it was spread out for Lee and me to see—the damnedest racket you could imagine. I wanted to warn Tony then and there to stay away from the Spaghetti House, but when I was about to speak up Lee kicked me under the table. He was right, of course. We didn't have a thing.

But the next day we marched back to Commercial-Philadelphia.

O.K. I guess insurance business is pretty dull, and it was the first excitement he'd had come along his way for some time. He said his own office force would get the letters out, and we left the list of the twenty-six stiffs with him.

I was dragged off district for a week to go up to Wilkes-Barre to cover a murder trial. When I got back, Baldwin had the answers.

"It looks like you fellows are really clicking," he said, shoving a report across his desk. Lee

Wun Tu Foo stuck his mitt in his pocket and walked off . . . I looked at Tony and he'd changed somehow; he had grown pale.

"Look," I told Baldwin. "We got to find out from every insurance company in the country whether they insured these mugs or not. Now we know that if we write 'em, they won't even bother to answer. If they do, they'll tell us it's none of our damn business. But you, as one insurance company to another—"

Baldwin pulled a long face.

"Do you fellows happen to know that there are three hundred big life insurance companies in the United States?" he asked.

We didn't, and it did sound like a pretty large order. Then Baldwin started hemming and hawing about professional ethics. He had a lot of other objections, too. But finally he said and I looked at it, and our eyes popped. Every one of those guys was insured for ten grand. And in every case, Wun Tu Foo was the beneficiary. In most cases, he'd already collected. And to show what a smart egg he was, so no one company would get suspicious, each of those twenty-six mugs was insured in a different outfit.

The gimmick was, of course, that the Chink was doing the same thing that a lot of banks do, only on a bigger scale. He was insuring the lives of borrowers for the ostensible purpose of protecting the money he loaned out. But where a bank loans dough merely for the interest it will get, Wun Tu Foo loaned it so he would

have a good reason to insure the borrower. And where a bank only takes out enough insurance on the borrower to cover the loan, Wun Tu Foo was insuring the borrowers for ten to twenty times the amount of their debt.

That wasn't all. He used the cheap industrial type of straight life policy that's easy to get and doesn't cost the borrower much to keep up.

Naturally, when we'd learned all this, we were beyond our depth. So we marched into the district attorney's office and laid the case before him. And he started a quiet investigation along a new line.

There'd already been autopsies on Cortese and Pisticci. But the D.A. got a court order for disinterment, anyway, and the docs took another look. Still they couldn't find anything.

The D.A. set a watch on Wun Tu Foo. And Lee and I warned Tony Di Stasio that any time Wun Tu Foo served him, he wasn't to eat the food. And, of course, we had to tell him why.

I'll say this for Tony, he had nerve. Any other guy learning what the score was would have made tracks pronto and put on the nose bag somewhere else. But not Tony.

"Why that lousy, yellow-bellied sewer rat!" Tony exploded. "I'll fix his clock!"

"Easy, Tony," Lee warned him. "No rough stuff."

"You mean I can't paste him a couple?" Tony asked.

"You don't paste him," I said. "You just act like nothing's happened."

OF COURSE, Lee and I told our bosses what the pitch was, and we were assigned to stay with the case to the exclusion of everything else. Every night either Lee or I would drop into the Spaghetti House with Tony for supper. And every night Maria served us. Then, one night, when I was with Tony, Wun Tu Foo served the spaghetti.

I'm telling you, I shook in my boots when I saw that Chink coming up with the food. Naturally, we didn't eat a bite. But we made a pretty good pretense, and we managed to scrape off some into paper sacks we carried in our pockets for just that purpose.

It was when Wun Tu Foo came around to the table a second time with the spumoni that a funny thing happened. He'd just put down a dish and he made a grab at something like he was catching a fly. Then he stuck his mitt in his pocket and walked off. I thought he was crazy as a bedbug. But then I looked at Tony and he'd changed somehow. He had grown pale. And yet he didn't seem to notice anything himself.

After a while we left the joint and I dropped Tony off at his house and went on home. When I came down to work the next day, Tony was dead.

Same thing. Maria had been with him when he died.

"It was like he was choking to death, Larry," she sobbed.

I took the scraps of food around to the D.A. and he sent them to the city chemist to be analyzed. And the city chemist drew a blank.

Then I rounded up Lee, and we went over to the morgue where Doc Turner was performing the autopsy.

An autopsy isn't a very pleasant thing, and I won't go into the details. But Doc Turner had just finished up and there was Tony's body on the operating table. Turner was looking steadily at the body, and I was looking at him. And then, slowly, his mouth began to open and the pupils of eyes widened.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "How could I be so blind?"

I didn't get what he was talking about. And neither did Lee. My eyes followed his.

"But don't you get it?" he stammered.

Lee said quietly, "I do. It hasn't any shadow."

I stared at the body. I can't define my sensations. When you're up against something utterly outside of any previous experience, you're simply floored for a time. I think Doc Turner got the worst shock, because, like most docs, he always was trying to find a rational explanation for everything. They tell me he went out and got drunk for two days. As for Lee and myself, once we got out of the morgue, we made a beeline for the nearest tappie.

After the first double-header, I said, "No wonder all those stiffs gave me the creeps."

Lee, who had been so matter-of-fact at the morgue, said, "Of course, it explains how Wun Tu Foo does it."

"And why he made a grab at the table when Tony and I were sitting there," I added.

TO BOTH of us there returned fragments of exotic reading: of Karen wizards who caught the wandering souls of sleepers and transferred them to the bodies of the dead; of the Kaffir belief in the shadow as a man's spirit; of the greedy soul-hunters of Malaya.

I don't know whether Doc Turner told the D.A. about it or not. I have a hunch he didn't, for the simple reason that the D.A. would have thought Doc crazy. But at any rate it was that afternoon that the D.A. ordered Wun Tu Foo picked up for questioning. And it was that night that the D.A. called Lee and me in because we'd started the whole thing. After seven hours of continuous grilling, the D.A. was getting nowhere fast.

I wasn't too happy about going into the same

room with Wun Tu Foo. And neither was Lee.

Wun Tu Foo was sitting at a long conference table, flanked by the chief county detective on one side and another dick on the other. The D.A. was sitting across from them, and he nodded us into seats beside him. I sat down on the D.A.'s right and Lee sat at his left.

The lighting in City Hall is pretty old, and it isn't very scientific, and there were lamps behind Wun Tu Foo and lamps behind us so that all our shadows criss-crossed on the big table.

The D.A. was a big, imposing man, and like a lot of big men he was inclined to be pontifical.

"There will be no murder charge," he began, turning to me. "In fact, although I am morally certain that this man is responsible for the deaths of twenty-seven persons, there will be no charge of any kind. I dislike to admit it, but I have no evidence."

I was watching Wun Tu Foo. His face was a mask, but his slow-moving eyes turned first to Lee and then to me. He seemed to be wondering how we fitted in, seemed to be adding two and two. And he couldn't have helped remembering that I was with Tony the night before he died.

"However," continued the D.A., "I have asked the Director of Public Health to quarantine this man's restaurant as a menace to the health of our citizens. Tomorrow I will go into the Court of Common Pleas and request a permanent injunction to enjoin this man from ever operating a restaurant here again."

Wun Tu Foo's eyelids flickered. It was his first sign of annoyance.

"Furthermore," said the D.A., "I am writing to each life insurance company in the United States to explain the facts. I will tell them that by means unknown to us twenty-seven customers of this man have died, leaving this man the beneficiary of twenty-seven separate insurance policies in twenty-seven different companies. I believe that this will effectively end the wave of sudden deaths in the neighborhood of Fourth and Catharine Streets."

The black, pin-pointed pupils of Wun Tu Foo's eyes came to rest on my face. There was hate in those eyes, hate born of the frustration of his cruel, avaricious designs. Swiftly and with calculation, his glance lowered to the table. Then, so quickly that I was unable to push my chair back, his right hand darted out, closed firmly over the table and withdrew into the pocket of his coat.

I had seen that quick movement before, only twenty-four hours earlier when I had dined with Tony. I knew what it meant. Yet I was so paralyzed with terror that I could only stare into Wun Tu Foo's suddenly eerie face. The wisp of an evil smile curved his lips.

"I fix," he said confidently.

The D.A. was on his feet, roaring. He saw that something was wrong, even as Turner and Lee and I had. Yet he, like us, could not tell what it was.

"Here, here!" he demanded. "What's going on!"

The detectives on either side of the Chinaman were at a complete loss. One of them half rose, uncertain. Already Wun Tu Foo's hand was working in his pocket. And as I watched with cold fascination, waiting to be blasted into eternity, Wun Tu Foo suddenly gasped. His eyes bugged out. Then, slowly, he collapsed against the table.

"He seems to have died by suffocation," the police surgeon said when he arrived a few minutes later. "And yet—"

The surgeon frowned in perplexity. He glanced at us one by one. He didn't know that what had happened, of course, was that in the criss-cross of shadows Wun Tu Foo had missed mine and snatched his own.

"Riley Grannan's Last Adventure"

This is the classic of funeral sermons—the sermon delivered in a burlesque theater in Rawhide, Nevada, by Herman W. Knickerbocker, the busted preacher-prospector, over the body of Riley Grannan, the dead-broke gambler.

Now that we are able to get the paper again ADVENTURE has ordered a large reprint of this famous booklet. The price is ten cents.

Adventure
205 East 42nd Street
New York 17, N. Y.

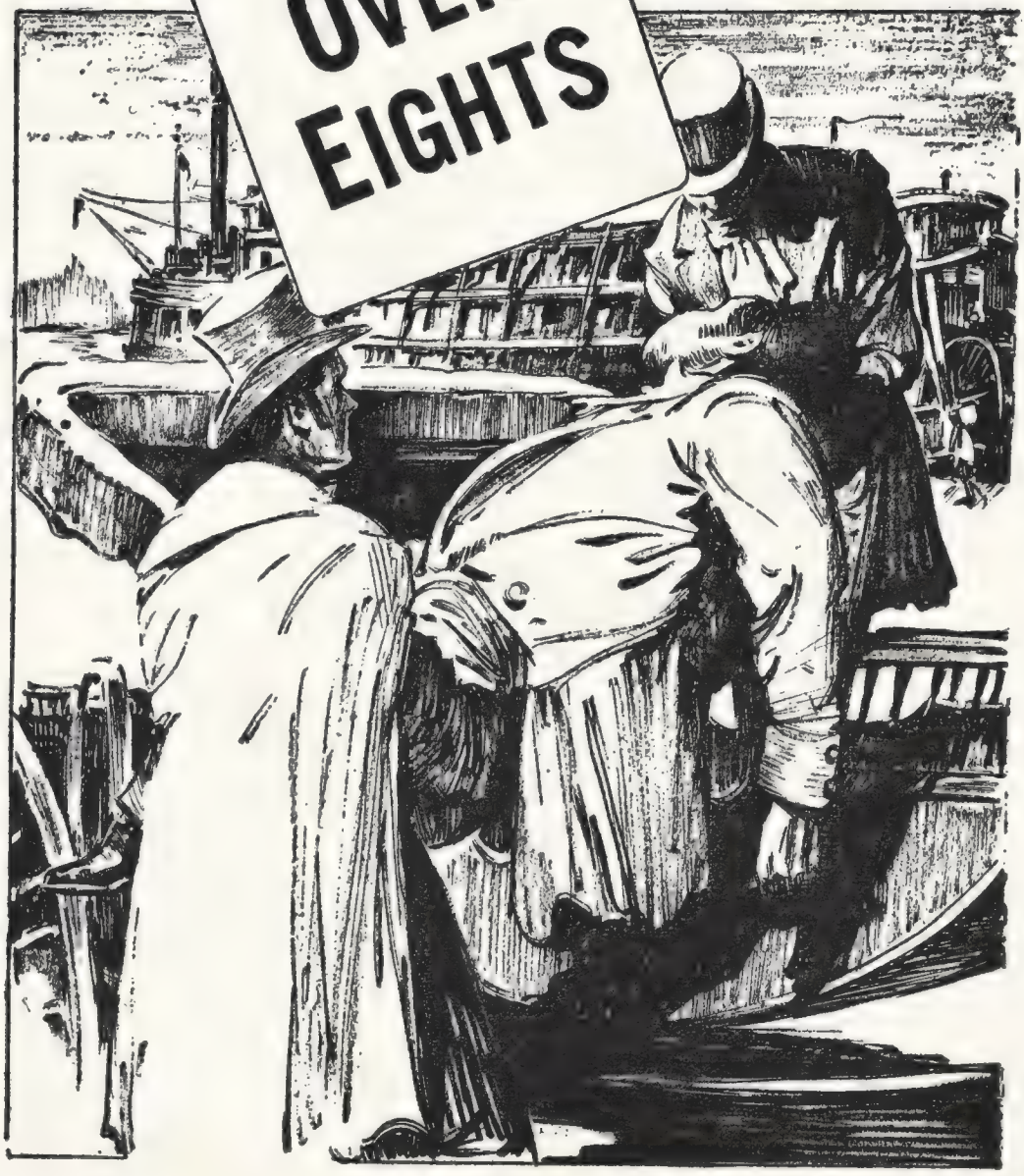
Please send me.....copies of "Riley Grannan's Last Adventure."
I am enclosing.....cents. (10c in stamps or coin for each copy desired.)

.....
Name Street Address

.....
City or Town State

ACES OVER EIGHTS

By
WILLIAM
DuBOIS



ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

It had taken all of Grady's strength, with an assist from Carter himself, to pry Don Enrique from carriage to pier, and from pier to gangway.

ACES over eights. Carter fanned out his three face-cards on the green baize cloth, and reminded himself again that a professional riverboat gambler (or even a brevet-captain in the United States Army, posing as same) consults his hole-card but once in stud poker.

Aces over eights—and one card to come from the thin-faced stud dealer who sat hunched on the stool between Grady and the Texas cattleman. Since this was a wide-open game, the dealer was strictly neutral—a quill-driver from the purser's office of the *Natchez Belle,* bonded by the owners of the side-wheeler themselves, guaranteed to shuffle thoroughly and deal only from the top of the pack. The *Natchez Belle* was a true queen of the Mississippi, and her owners had found, long ago, that it saved lives to have an assistant purser handle the deal in all poker games while the side-wheeler was in mid-stream.

Carter could only applaud such diplomacy. Since he was posing as a professional sharper for reasons of his own, his frequent appearances at the round green tables just off the main saloon were essential. The fact that the game was honest relieved him of the necessity of winning . . . . What would the other players think of a full-time gambler who was already eight thousand gold dollars in the hole?

He glanced around the table at the four other poker faces, brushing four other pairs of intent, basilisk eyes. The tall Texan, brown as his own saddle-leather, a lean ramrod of a man in his ruffled shirt and white cutaway, shifted his cheroot and spat elegantly before he checked his cards again. On the Texan's left, the Creole planter from Baton Rouge frowned discreetly at the gesture, and poured again from the well-iced champagne bottle at his elbow. Each of these players had approximately a thousand of Carter's dollars in their individual satinwood bins that edged the table. Don Enrique Canova, on his left, had over three thousand.

He stared resentfully at Don Enrique (who was, after all, the reason behind his subterfuge tonight); and the Spaniard, fat as a healthy porker and twice as contented, only beamed in reply. He's enjoying this trip just as much as Grady, thought Carter. Back in St. Augustine, a mere month ago, he insisted that he was dying, that only Grady and I could remove the cause. Now that we're New Orleans-bound to do just that, he perks up like a—a shoat that just been reprieved from the farmer's axe.

His eyes moved on to Grady, and he felt his resentment deepen. Grady, as a sergeant in the same Army that his captain served, had every excuse to be ill-at-ease in skin-tight smallclothes, a waistcoat like a tropic sunburst, a cutaway of apple-green broadcloth that sported buttons the size of four-bit pieces. But Sergeant Grady sported his finery in the manner born, right down to the lemon verbena that saturated his neatly-folded silk kerchief, the macassar oil that gave him the aura of a traveling *coiffeur*. Like all born actors, he was one with his role. Even from where he sat, Carter was hard-put to remember that his sergeant was not the traveler in pharmaceutical sundries he pretended to be . . .

"The aces bet," said the dealer.

CARTER came back to the realities of the moment with a painful bump. With aces and an eight showing, and a second eight buried, he clearly topped every other hand around the board, at this stage in the game. With the pile of chips in the pot already mountain-high, this was his moment to plunge. Keeping his fingers steady—as befitted a man who could drop eight thousand dollars without ruffling his aplomb—he took up a handful of markers from his bin, and tossed them on the green baize with only the most perfunctory count.

"Aces over eights, gentlemen," he murmured. "The dead man's hand. Surely you all know that it never loses."

"You are a gentleman, Mr. Carter," said Don Enrique Canova. "But this time, you are mistaken. I see your three thousand, and raise it once again."

Grady looked at his pair of treys, and yawned. "If you have two pair, Mr. Carter, I'll buy the next round of drinks from my winnings. At the moment, *I* have three treys. Please believe me."

Even his accent is scented with lemon verbena, snarled Carter inwardly. But he merely bowed without rising, as Grady saw both raises, and pushed the pot five thousand dollars higher. The Texan let out a muted whoop of joy, patted his three-card flush lovingly, and raised again. The Creole planter shook his head sadly, and tossed his cards aside.

"Fight it out, *mes amis*. I will watch, and enjoy my wine."

Two more rounds of raising closed the betting on that card: Grady continued to tilt the pot as his turn came, and it was only when the Texan leveled on his flush in the making, and Carter gratefully followed suit, that Don Enrique called for the deal to continue. Over forty thousand dollars were now in the pot—and Carter felt the pressure of the onlookers around their table. The dealer sent the cards sailing to each player, with a bored chant for each flip of his tired white wrist.

"A six of clubs—three hearts showing! An eight of diamonds! A five of spades! A trey of hearts! Three treys showing—the treys bet."

The Texan, who had failed to make his flush, swore amiably as he tossed in his hand: a rancher who owned the equivalent of two eastern counties in grazing land could toss off such misfortune with a laugh. Don Enrique, who had also failed to fill his hand—but whose tun-barreled paunch was awash in good whiskey long ago—matched the Texan's cursing as he followed suit. Carter guessed how drunk the Spaniard was by his manner: though he was one of the richest men in the Floridas, Don Enrique's penny-pinching was notorious in every Army post from Pensacola to Lauderdale. He faced Grady across the green battlefield, and waited tensely.

"If you've fours, Mr. Grady—please prove it."

Grady smiled like a sphinx with a millennium of time to spare. "It's too bad we agreed on table-stakes, Mr. Carter. I happen to own a small factory in Pittsburgh—and a really large one in Manhattan. You'd have to buy them both before I'd expose this hole-card." He pushed his entire stack of chips forward as he spoke—and it was a tottering stack, augmented by most of Carter's losses. "By the way, did you happen to fill your full house?"

"I did indeed, Mr. Grady. Next time, I'll take an appraisal on those factories—and match it." But despite his careful drawl, Carter could not avoid snatching a look at his hole-card. The dead man's hand had, indeed, changed to a closed full house.

"Would you match my bet with cash, Mr. Carter?"

"With cash—and a note on my banker in New Orleans."

"Put down the cash on your person now, sir. I'll see the bet."

Carter swallowed hard—and reached for his wallet with a glare that matched his sergeant's. Grady's off-hand play-acting had inspired aim, after all. At this moment, it was hard to remember that Grady's cabin adjoined his on the promenade overhead. That the sergeant would return his winnings in another hour.

The crowded game-room let out a long sigh in perfect unison as the two gentlemen slapped their wads of folding money on the cloth. The sigh held, as the dealer counted it with languid, expert fingers.

"Three treys, calling two pair."

"Four treys," said Grady—exposing his hole card at last, and raking in the pot. "And the drinks are on me, Mr. Carter. I see you have the dead man's hand, after all."

CHAPTER II

VOODOO AND GOLD

GRADY sat at the small folding table beside Carter's bunk, and divided the gold-pieces and bank-notes into matching stacks. The sergeant's expression was both concentrated and supremely content. In his undershirt and bursting small-clothes, with the great corded muscles of his forearms rippling like hard silk in the lamplight, he seemed no less natural than he had at the poker table in the white-and-gold saloon downstairs. Carter, taking his own ease in a nest of pillows on the bunk, watched his sergeant in muted wonder.

As always, he felt a little strange out of uniform—and stranger still, on this floating palace under Mississippi stars. The throb of the *Belle's* paddles in the velvet dark—which should have been soothing—only served to remind him of his masquerade. Grady, it seemed, was reveling in it—just as he reveled in a dress-parade, or a tour of duty in the 'Glades. Grady, in short, enjoyed life as it came, even when lead and scalping knives were flying. Like all first-class sergeants since war was invented, he seemed immortal to the casual eye. A man who could survive three years of war with the Seminoles could take the present in his stride.

"Don't look so unhappy, Captain," said Grady. "After all, we've done stranger jobs."

"How much did you win tonight?"

"Just over fifty thousand, sir. Most of it came out of that final pot. I might add that you sweetened it to perfection—"

"Never mind that. How much did you take from the cattle king?"

"Off-hand, I couldn't say. Twenty thousand, maybe. He can afford it."

"And how much from Don Enrique?"

"Don Enrique, as usual, broke almost even. He just dropped his winnings in the end."

"Did you win honestly?"

The sergeant's look of virtue would have melted a hanging judge. "After all, sir, you're the riverboat gambler—not me."

"Perhaps we should have traded roles at the start."

"Not at all, Captain. We agreed on that, too. You look the part—I don't. Is it my fault I can't help playing my cards close?"

Carter tossed up his hands. "Very well, Grady. Keep your winnings—I won't ask questions. But I haven't worn civilian clothes since we visited Key West to fight the wreckers. I don't feel comfortable, pretending to be something I'm not."

"Can't you look on it as an extended furlough, sir?"

"Not for a moment."

"We were in Boston when we got our orders. We come back to our regiment by way of the Mississippi, and the Gulf—with a stop-over in New Orleans. I'm enjoying the trip, sir—why can't you?"

"Because I don't enjoy playing nursemaid to Don Enrique Canova."

"Don Enrique's an old party, Captain," said Grady. "He's a right to a few bogies. He's also important in the general's scheme of things."

"So he's entitled to a two-man Army escort, when he makes a business trip?"

"That's about it, sir. Let's say he's lonesome, with only one servant. Let's say he has bad dreams when he travels—'specially, when he's traveling to New Orleans."

"Would we be assigned to guard him, if that were all?"

Grady beamed. "I accept the compliment, Captain—for us both."

"When we met on the pier at Natchez, he looked dead on his feet. You saw him tonight. How d'you account for the change?"

"Put yourself in the old hogshead's place, sir. Suppose you were convinced that someone in New Orleans was killing you by inches, with black magic. Wouldn't you perk up, if you had a bodyguard like us?"

"Why can't we guard him in uniform?"

"This isn't our bailiwick. Officially, we're still on furlough. 'Twouldn't do to scare Don Enrique's devils away too soon. He wants us to take 'em apart in New Orleans. See what makes 'em tick."

"And exorcise them too, I suppose?"

"Come again, sir?"

"Never mind, Grady." Carter went gloomily to the window of his cabin, and stared out at the sheen of starlight on the river. "Just tell me what you think of this. I can stand it."

"I think the old gentleman's right. We should be careful."

"Don Enrique was born a gentleman, but he's outgrown it long ago. Right now, he's a money-bag with moths inside. The last man on earth to believe in voodoo."

"Be that as it may, sir. He still controls most of the food in Florida. If he says the word, the Army starves. If you ask me, I think we'd best go on humoring him."

"D'you think he's being witched to death?" Carter asked.

GRADY considered. "I've seen it happen, sir. Once on the Isthmus, once again in Port au Prince. Big strapping fellows, both times. Said it was nonsense, until they started losing bits of personal things from their rooms: handkerchiefs, pipes, and such like. Until when someone you couldn't see or hear clipped a lock of their hair while they slept. Next morning both of 'em were dead as mutton. Believe it or not, we found the dolls under both their pillows. Rag and mud dolls, dressed in their handkerchiefs, with pipe-stem legs and human hair for top-knots. Each with a bodkin shoved through the spot where a heart would be—if dolls had hearts."

"And you believe that, Grady?"

"I only say, I saw it happen. 'Course they might have been poisoned. Or witched themselves to death. Queerer things have killed folks, if they're scared enough. And Don Enrique was a hornswoggled hombre on that Natchez pier-head."

"Then he honestly believes we can protect him from *that?*"

"What else can we think, sir? As I say, I'm flattered. So flattered, I think we ought to play our cards close—and not mention our real business. Which is killing Indians, not chasing spooks."

"I wish I were back in the scrub right now."

"Excuse me, sir—but I don't believe a word of it."

Back in the scrub. . . Carter closed his eyes, and let the hot, taut memory of his campaigning burn his mind again. He saw the sad yellow silhouettes of the cypress against the Florida sky, heard the whine of the whip-saw in the hammock, as his men felled logs for the corduroy road that would link Forts Dallas and Lauderdale. He heard the crack of Grady's rifle, as he signaled the approach of an Indian scouting party. He felt the lash of sawgrass at his cheek, as he dropped into his prepared trench, and laid his cheek against his own English breech-loader, waiting for the first war bonnet to show in the pale green mist of dog fennel . . .

When he opened his eyes again, the Mississippi still gleamed like a monster snake under the stars. A silent, confident snake, moving on business of its own. He put the image behind him, and turned back to Grady.

"I've fought everything from Creeks to diamond-backs. Never witches."

"Never you mind, Captain," said Grady. "My guess is that these witches are real."

"Mine, too. I only wish I knew if Don Enrique was one of them."

"Or the 'Gator?" Grady held up a warning palm. "Easy does it, sir. Someone's on the promenade."

Carter had marveled before at his sergeant's uncanny hearing. Marooned on a grass-hummock in the 'Glades, he had counted heads in an approaching attack, long before those heads had shown among the sawgrass patches. It did not surprise him now when someone tapped on the cabin door, before he could draw a second breath.

Quintero

"Quintero's light on his feet," said Grady.

Don Enrique's servant was already bowing in the door-frame. Quintero, reflected Carter, should have been grotesque—and wasn't. A vest-pocket edition of his master, plus a heart-broken, lopsided grin, the fellow was brown as a coffee bean and graceful as some dark, bloated cat. The sleepy eyes went with that picture; so did the halfmoon of sharp whiskers that edged Quintero's jawbones.

He had always been Don Enrique's personal slave; in St. Augustine, they were a common sight in the Plaza of the Constitution on Sunday mornings—the master, pontifical in his white broadcloth, the slave mincing a safe step behind, with an enormous red cotton umbrella tilted at just the right angle to shade the once-patrician Canova brow. Some said that Don Enrique had bought his house-boy from the Seminoles, when Florida was still under the Spanish crown. Others insisted that Quintero had been sired by a baboon on the Gold Coast, and brought to Florida by mistake, between the close-packed decks of a black-

birder. Be that as it may, added Carter now, it's quite natural that Quintero should pop out of the darkness, with that dwarf's cringe —and that monkey-grin intact.

"You pardon, *señores*—but will you attend Don Enrique in his cabin now?" The slave's manner was deferential enough: why should Carter feel that it was more command than request?

"Isn't your master asleep by now?"

"He is too happy to sleep, Captain. Too glad that you are aboard to preserve him from evil." The dwarf often seemed to recite rather than speak—as though he were airing the ragged end of a quotation drifting in his mind. Once again, Carter wondered if Quintero's smile had a mocking quirk, after all. If Quintero considered his master a bare-faced faker, and nothing more.

"Take a glass with him, gentlemen. He awaits your pleasure."

Your master has had far too much to drink now, thought Carter. By the time we reach his cabin, he'll be ready with another story of his struggling youth—or tuning his guitar for a Catalan love song. But he followed Quintero to the deck without protest. Only when they reached the forward companionway did he yield to impulse and pull up short.

"You go ahead, Grady. I'll be in when I've had a cigar."

IT WAS cooler on the texas deck, under the stars. From this height, the Mississippi gleamed wide as the sea; the faint, smudged line of the banks seemed something that the Creator of this wide night-magic had put in as an after-thought. Carter stood for a while behind the pilot, watching him baby the huge wheel as the *Natchez Belle* ghosted proudly downstream, with the full impact of the current behind her paddle-boxes. It was good to stand here in the dark alone, feeling the steamer's easy rhythm in the night, hearing the hoarse pant of her boilers as the gang of black stokers tossed in the fat pine-chunks far below. Good to hold this bizarre tour-of-duty at arm's length awhile, and fit in the pieces . . .

Grady, as usual, was right as rain. The thing that plagued Don Enrique Canova was real enough. It only remained for Brevet-Captain John Carter to give it a name.

Picking up the pieces, he began with the general's letter. It had reached him in Boston just two weeks ago—and he conned it again now, by the spill of light from a window in the texas:

. . . By this time, Jack, you know me well enough to agree that I don't give orders without reason. So when I ask you to take Grady, proceed at Army expense to Natchez, Mississippi, and return to Florida in the company of Enrique, you'll know I can't help myself.

Don't ask me why the old goat insists that he needs two of my best men as bodyguards on a routine business trip. When Enrique Canova takes a notion, I've found it wise to humor him—up to a point, at least. I'll leave you to decide when that point is reached. And how much truth is in the rumor that 'Gator Duval is out to skin Enrique alive, the moment he sets foot in New Orleans.

Colonel Bruff will give you the details when you report to him in Natchez. Enrique, I believe, is coming down from Memphis, buying and selling along the way. He doesn't seem to feel he's in any danger until he gets inside 'Gator's "aura," as he calls it, which begins somewhere to the south . . .

Bruff, a West Pointer with a ramrod for a spine, had wasted no words when Brevet-Captain Carter came to attention in his neat pine office in Natchez.

"Señor Canova's a sick man, Captain. Sick enough to need a nurse, if he insists on going downriver today."

"He's in town, then?"

"I've just come from his hotel suite. Said he couldn't wait to put himself under the protection of the Army. Not that it's helped him much, so far." The colonel had a thin, but not unkindly, smile. "Sit down, Captain. I'm only formal on parade. You're from the Point, I believe?"

"Class of 1836, sir."

"And you've soldiered in the Floridas ever since?"

"Almost from the start of the Indian wars."

"Then you've seen this tub of lard in his native setting. What d'you think of him?"

"He's a clever man, Colonel. And enormously rich, for the territory. As you know, he bought out most of the English factors years ago—including many of the Panton Company's holdings in West Florida. Most of our sutlers are dependent on his stores to fill their own orders. Our quartermasters couldn't keep an Army in the field without him. I might add, it's a fact of which he takes full advantage."

"Why should a man of his brains believe in voodoo?"

"Has he admitted as much?"

"Without using the word. New Orleans is a fair distance downriver, Captain. How else could 'Gator Duval begin destroying him now?"

"Does he blame 'Gator for his illness?"

"He does, indeed. I gather you know 'Gator as well?"

"Only by legend, Colonel. As I understand it, they grew up together in Augustine. They were partners, under the Spanish king, when the British surrendered Florida. Both of them

could have been little more than boys, then." Carter tried to picture Don Enrique as a boy, and gave up the struggle. "It's common gossip that Enrique cheated 'Gator Duval out of a fortune some ten years ago, and drove him out of the territory."

"How did Duval get his nickname, by the way?"

"As a boy, he used to wrestle with alligators, to amuse His Majesty's officers—when there was still a British garrison in St. Augustine. In the moat of Fort San Marcos, to be exact." To his surprise, Carter found that he could see that picture quite clearly. "Saving the shillings they tossed his way gave him the start on his fortune. That, and Don Enrique. There's no doubt that the two grew rich together—until their quarrel."

"So that's why Duval came to New Orleans."

"He had relatives in the Quarter—it's said he took what Enrique left him and established a rival business there. Swearing the usual oath to break his friend eventually. Both of them were already old men. Don Enrique must be crowding seventy today. In spite of that, it seems the 'Gator has built up a sizable fortune in the past decade. Don't ask me his line—New Orleans isn't my country."

"Nor mine, praise heaven," said Bruff.

"I know he operates one of the finest gambling hells in the Vieux Carré—and a restaurant that's known on three continents. I've heard that he keeps half the Creole ladies of the town in love potions, and advises most of the bigwigs on everything from business deals to the elimination of competitors. Of course, that's only hearsay. 'Gator Duval covers his tracks beautifully."

"But Don Enrique is still mortally afraid to set foot in New Orleans."

"Exactly, sir. Of course, he has any number of connections to keep up there. But this is the first time he's visited the town in person." Carter smiled wryly. "At that, you can't blame him too much. His last three factors died before they could make a report. One was found drowned in the river. The others just turned up their toes in hotel rooms before the doctor could reach them. They called it heart failure, for want of a better word."

"I gather you're to save Don Enrique from a heart attack, if possible."

"Duval has already begun to move into his territory around Pensacola. When the Indian wars are over, they say, he's ready to finance the railroad boom that's bound to start around Tallahassee." Carter grinned in earnest. "Maybe that's why Don Enrique is pining away to a shadow now. Maybe he's made up his mind to face his old enemy in person, and have it out."

"Does he have that much courage?"

"Why shouldn't he, sir—with the United States Army behind him?"

The colonel had snapped to his feet crisply on that. "Take over, Captain. It's your detail, from now on—and your responsibility."

"I'm well aware of that, Colonel Bruff."

"I've arranged for your transport tonight, on the *Natchez Belle;* you and your sergeant will share adjoining cabins."

"And Don Enrique . . . ?"

"Apparently he's content just to have you aboard. He's taken the royal suite, as usual. I've ordered you a civilian wardrobe, as your commanding general directed. I hope you endorse my taste in waistcoats, Captain Carter."

"Shall we call at Don Enrique's hotel before sailing?"

"His body-servant will see that he makes the boat."

COLONEL BRUFF had been in error on that point: it had taken all of Grady's strength, with an assist from Carter himself, to pry Don Enrique from carriage to pier, and from pier to gangway. Four hulking black stewards had made a chair of their hands, and eased the Florida Croesus to the red-plush magnificence of his cabin. Quintero, a fat but agile monkey in his rusty servant's black, had danced nimbly ahead to turn down the covers of the gargoyled four-poster . . .

"Thank you so much for coming, Captain. I hope you are not already too late."

"You'll feel better when you've slept, *señor.*"

Don Enrique's temples had been wet with sweat that afternoon, when the *Natchez Belle* hooted a raucous farewell to her home pier, and bulled her way into the sleek tan immensity of the river. But Don Enrique had slept like a baby until the dinner bugle, with Quintero perched on the bed-steps. Carter would never forget his astonishment when their charge waddled into the bar that evening, in a plum-colored coat and a waistcoat like a restrained sunburst, and bellowed for a waiter even before he could settle at their table.

"You drink absinthe, gentlemen. So shall I."

They had had their first session of poker, after a gargantuan repast in the dining saloon. Don Enrique had rolled to bed long after midnight, happy as a boy on his first jamboree. Next morning he had been back for more, before the bar could open its doors—his malaise wiped out as though it had never been.

Was it possible that the old hellion relied on a lone Army captain, and his sergeant, with such blind faith? Carter still waited for an answer to that question when he sensed Quintero's presence at his elbow. The Spanish Seminole—if one could call him that—offered his heartbroken smile in the starlight.

"Don Enrique still hopes you will drink with him, *señor.*"

Don Enrique slept like a baby until the dinner bugle, with Quintero perched on the bed-steps.

"I've done nothing else since Natchez."

"Perdone, señor?"

"Never mind, Quintero. I know it's my job. I'm even beginning to enjoy it a little."

He followed the dwarf down the texas deck. Even before they could descend to the promenade below, they heard Don Enrique's voice raised in song. A rich, full-bodied baritone, only faintly slurred by alcohol—caroling that same Catalan ballad. Carter knew without asking that the guitar accompaniment was Grady's, though the sergeant had never before revealed the fact that he was a musician.

It was quite like Grady to put in guitar chords at the right moment—to draw four treys in a stud game that could not avoid being honest—to face the nameless threat downriver, all with the same infectious good humor. Carter found that he was humming to the lilting rhythm of that guitar as Quintero bowed him into the royal suite of the *Natchez Belle*.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE OF 'GATOR DUVAL

THE street—it was little more than a dog-leg lane in the heart of New Orleans' French Quarter—seemed to double on itself as it wound south, toward the Place Yolande. A lane of pale, blind-windowed houses that stood serene as time in the siesta hush of afternoon, its wrought-iron balconies heavy with rust and flowering vines, its gardens muffled in the same heat-drugged repose. Carter swung his rattan with the most debonair flourish he could manage, and hoped he was not too prosperous for the neighborhood. It seemed incredible that one of the great restaurants of the world stood just beyond, where the lane opened to the square. It was just as strange that its owner, Monsieur Victor Duval had once wrestled with alligators in the moat of an old Spanish fort.

He had strolled down from the flamboyant hotel Don Enrique had chosen as a matter of course, leaving Grady snoring peacefully in the double room they shared. There would be time enough to steal a nap of his own, when he had satisfied his curiosity. Time enough to decide just what his next move would be when he had taken his adversary's measure.

A latticed door swung open under his walking stick. For a moment, he paused in the grateful green dusk of Duval's bar—knowing, even before his eyes could pick out details, that the place lived up to its name, despite its shabby exterior. Great gilt mirrors gave back his reflection endlessly from facing walls; there were deep wall-booths gleaming with mahogany, and a bar like a crystal temple to Bacchus. A Negro in a white jacket, slender as a wasp, had already whisked up to take his hat and stick. Another Negro, in a long apron, was bowing from the waist as he offered Carter a choice of seats.

"I'll drink at the bar, thank you. What is the *spécialité de la maison?*"

"*Absinthe frappé, monsieur.*" It seemed logical that the black barman's French should be as faultless as his manner. Logical, too, that his drink should be tall and frosted and stinging cold with the cracked ice that choked the glass. They had served iced drinks on the *Natchez Belle;* after three years in the Florida pine-barrens, Carter had begun to adjust to the luxury.

As he sipped the perfumed coldness of the absinthe, he let his eyes stray through the archway to the room beyond—a tall, dusky room with green hooded chandeliers and long tables covered with dust-cloths. This, then, was the famous gambling room of Duval's; the restaurant itself, raised on a kind of mezzanine beyond, was only another shrouded magnificence at this hour. It pleased Carter to find the place empty. Would it be risking too much to ask for the owner now, or should he weigh his opening remarks over a second absinthe?

"Monsieur Duval will see you when you wish, Captain."

He looked up from his drink, and tried not to stare at the polite young man who had just addressed him. He saw instantly that this Negro was on a different echelon from the bar stewards. His manner, while deferential, was crisp with authority. Everything about him murmured discreetly of Paris, from the lacquered boots to the boutonniere at one satin lapel.

"I am Monsieur Duval's *maître d'hôtel,* sir. As I say, he's been expecting you since the *Natchez Belle* docked this noon."

"But he couldn't!" Surprise, Carter realized, was not his cue. The words had burst out regardless.

"Monsieur Duval has ways of knowing things, Captain Carter. Will you follow me?"

They walked in silence through the great gambling room. Carter saw that servants were beginning to strip the tables for evening. A boy with a long candle-spill was already lighting the great central chandelier. Somehow, that seemed natural too, though it was still bright day outside. A gambling hell was always at its best by artificial light. It was evident that 'Gator Duval had realized as much, when he planned this tall, grave room. . . 'Gator Duval. Carter gave a roulette wheel an absent twirl, and followed the *maître d'hôtel* to a curve of stairway in the far wall. The man who owned this splendor deserved a better nickname.

The Negro stood aside to let him pass. "Monsieur Duval is in his office. Will you go straight up, Captain? And may I send you another absinthe?"

"Thank you, no. I don't need a drink at the moment." Again, it was not a remark he would have chosen deliberately, yet it seemed to fit the situation like a glove.

THE door swung open under his hand. He was in a cell-like room lined to the ceiling with filing cabinets, cheerful with the blond afternoon light that beat at the close-drawn jalousies. The man behind the desk was a gentle anticlimax. A slender, snuff-brown Frenchman in white, his tanned skull bald as an egg, his dancing black eyes alive with welcome. Firm brown fingers closed on Carter's, in the friendliest of handshakes.

"Forgive me for calling you from the bar, Captain, but I've looked forward to this. Are you sure I can't have another drink sent up?"

"How did you know I refused one?"

"You'd be surprised what I know about you,

Carter swung his rattan with the most debonair flourish he could manage, and hoped he was not too prosperous for the neighborhood.

young man. At least, I hope you're still young enough to enjoy the thrill of wonder. I, who have passed my seventieth birthday long ago, can still enjoy it." The long, brown hand waved Carter to a chair; the dancing black eyes seemed to rivet him there. "Is there a greater thrill than exploring the human mind—in learning how unpredictable it can be? Take our mutual friend, Enrique Canova—or shall we begin with you, and Sergeant Grady?"

Carter blinked, then forced his eyes to meet Victor Duval's. Since I'm posing as a river gambler, he told himself firmly, I must keep my poker-face to the end.

"Why do you give Mr. Grady and myself military rank?"

"Because you are both soldiers. At the moment, you're assigned to guard my old friend Enrique—who still believes that my one purpose in life is to do him in. Don't accuse me of spying on you, Captain Carter—it just happens that I *know*. I have a genius for knowing what has happened—sometimes, what will happen.

For example: you left your hotel an hour ago, walked through the Quarter via the Promenade Publique, the Rue Royal, the Place d'Armes. From the latter square, you reached this address, on the Place Yolande, by following the narrow Rue des Petits-Pères—"

"I'm flattered that you should have me followed, Monsieur Duval."

"Believe me, you were not followed. Only in my mind. Shall I tell you how you paused to admire the bougainvillea in the Courtyard of the Two Sisters? Or how you compared the purple blossoms to the eyes of a girl in St. Augustine?"

Carter blinked in earnest. "You're an excellent guesser. My compliments."

"Only I am not guessing. It's a game I play to cheat my old age. The doctors have a name for such pastimes—telepathy. You might call my gift telepathy too—in reverse. I can extract from the minds of others things they do not wish extracted. Shall I tell you more about the young lady in question? How you stood in the shadow of her balcony on Charlotte Street, while your sergeant strummed his guitar and sang in your behalf? How you knelt at Mass in the Cathedral for six Sundays for a glimpse of her—you, a born Puritan?"

Carter gripped the chair-arms, as a slow chill prickled his spine. Oddly enough, he was more startled than disturbed. The dark eyes dancing in Duval's tanned face were still too friendly to inspire fear.

"Tell me more," he murmured. "I'm enjoying this."

"I'll tell you something that concerns us all, Captain. That grotesque *cochon* Enrique is shamming, for a reason all his own. When he boarded that river steamer at Natchez, he let you believe that he was a dying man—and that I was the cause. Actually, he was merely dosed to the ears with a potion his bodyservant had prepared and administered hours earlier. A mixture of herbs which the Seminoles call the 'black drink.' A purge to end all purges, Captain. Enrique has taken it before, after over-indulgence in drink—to prepare his tun-belly for further drinking. A principle the later Roman emperors followed, when they banqueted till dawn, thrust both thumbs down their throat in the vomitorium—and returned to banquet again."

"You mentioned a motive, I believe."

"Isn't it apparent? Enrique has been losing business to my agents for some years, now. He knows the time has come to meet me, face to face. To strike a bargain, if he can. Being a coward as well as a good actor, he felt the need of a bodyguard. He used his prestige with your commanding general in Augustine. You, and Sergeant Grady, are the result."

"I don't think it's quite that simple."

"The observation does you credit, Captain.

A boy with a long candle-spill was lighting the great central chandelier.

Enrique also knows that his meeting with me can have but one result. I'll challenge him—and he can't refuse."

"But you said you'd given up any idea of revenge."

"True. But I will still enjoy watching him writhe. Some men die when they lose blood, Captain; Enrique Canova will cease to exist when he loses his money. I propose to take that money from him, every cent of it—tonight."

"Forgive me, Monsieur Duval, but didn't you say you'd call him out?"

DUVAL nodded. "The duel I propose will take place at the poker table. I shall bet my little empire against his own—and win." He tapped his forehead with a long, brown finger. "That, too, is written here."

"Suppose he refuses?"

"He won't. In fact, he has come to New Orleans for that very reason. Enrique is no fool—he is merely a cheat who has prospered. Today, it is I who prosper at his expense. I undersell him in Pensacola; next year, I will undersell him throughout the South, and he knows it. I could take over his business tomorrow and run it perfectly. Or I could break him by inches, and enjoy his writhings—if I had not outgrown such pleasures. No, Captain, it will give me greater pleasure to break him tonight, at the poker table."

"How can you be so sure of winning?"

"That, too, is my secret."

"Will you rig the game?"

"The game will take place in my private poker room, after the three of you have dined as my guests. Don't frown, Captain—it will be quite honest. *You* will be the permanent dealer."

"How do you know I'm honest?"

Again, the long brown finger tapped its owner's forehead. "Another of my secrets, young man. Don't you endorse it?"

"What about Grady?"

"Your sergeant is a different story. A jack-of-all-trades, but, in this case, a master of one. Grady is a born poker player, Captain. Naturally, I shall be delighted to have him join the game."

"Are you suggesting that he'll cheat—or try to?"

"I'm merely telling you why Enrique Canova was so eager for your company—and Grady's. Or didn't you know that your sergeant has been giving Enrique private lessons in the game?"

"You mean—in cheating?"

"Perhaps it would be best not to pin down my precise meaning. Let us say only that Enrique now has every reason to think he can best me in my own gambling rooms—as he bested me over a kitchen table in Augustine, more than a half century ago."

So the pattern's complete, thought Carter. You may pretend to be detached from human emotions; you may even toss off this gift of fore-and-hindsight. Actually, you're delighted at what's coming. When a man has waited fifty-odd years to strike at an enemy, he doesn't pull his punch.

Aloud, he said only, "So you and Don Enrique have played poker before."

"Once only. When he was a starveling boy in Augustine, catching bridles at the Crown Inn. When I was known as 'Gator Duval, and rolled in the mud to earn my keep. We've come a long way since then, but the memory lingers. We'd just bought our first joint business enterprise—a fishing sloop. As boys will, we planned to expand into an armada, in time. And then, Enrique suggested that his was the better head for figures. That *he* should own the sloop—and the sloops to come. That he should keep our books ashore, and the lions share of the profits, while I went to sea, and brought in the catch."

"Is that when you parted company?"

"By no means. We decided to deal a cold hand of poker to settle the argument. Enrique won, and stayed ashore to grow rich. I lost—and learned my lesson at sea. I knew he'd won unfairly, but I could not prove it: even then, I had this gift for seeing into the minds of others, but I was in no position to turn it to account. Later, when he had used me as his stepping stone, Enrique trumped up a charge against me, and had me banished from the Floridas. You know the rest, Captain, if you've taken the trouble to check on my—shall I say, my enterprise?"

"I know nothing at all of you, except by hearsay."

Victor Duval smiled warmly. "I hope the gossips did me justice."

"You're more than a gambler, I'm sure."

"Let's say I'm a student of men who profits by what he learns. It sounds much more respectable."

"You are sure you'll profit in this game tonight?"

"Would you care to make a small wager that I don't?"

"Since I'm to deal, shouldn't I be neutral?"

"By no means, Captain Carter. You may deal yourself in when you like—and wager against me on the side."

"I'll consider the first offer, and decline the second," said Carter. "Just between ourselves, I hope you win. Every field officer in the Floridas would like to see the last of Enrique Canova—and his monopoly."

"I had hoped your good wishes were personal," said Duval.

It was Carter's turn to smile. "You should know they are—since you're a mind-reader."

DUVAL got briskly to his feet. It was still amazing that a man over seventy could move with such lithe assurance. "We part friends, then?"

"Until tonight."

"Until tonight, *mon capitaine*. Then we are adversaries over the poker table. But first, you will come here as my dinner guests. The invitations are already at your hotel. Don't worry—Enrique won't refuse. Even a simon-pure *cochon* could not resist the magic of my chefs."

They walked down the stairway together, pausing to look out over the gambling room. At the big center table, the roulette wheel was turning languidly, as a half-dozen players placed their bets. Dice rattled in a green-felt trough across the room; a party of baccarat was forming at another long table nearby. Duval included his empire in an easy gesture.

"In another hour, Captain, this room will be packed. So, for that matter, will the restaurant—save for the table I have reserved for your party. Will you wear your uniform, now the masquerade is over?"

"Since I'm to deal at stud, shouldn't I look the part?" Carter held out his hand a second time. "Besides, I'm not at all sure this ends the masquerade."

"Perhaps you're a mind-reader, too, Captain."

"Tell me one thing more. What hand will win for you tonight?"

"Aces over eights," said Duval. "What you Americans call the dead-man's hand. I'm sorry it lost for you on the *Natchez Belle.*"

The hand that gripped Carter's was as warmly alive as ever; but he felt his fingers chill to the bone as he dropped it.

"I'll deal you that hand—and it'll win?"

"Precisely, Captain. I'll tell you one thing more. You will see another dead man's hand before you quit New Orleans. Let it be a warning to you—and to Sergeant Grady." The black eyes danced again at Carter's puzzled frown. "Shall I tell you where you will see that hand—and why?"

"I think you've told me enough for now."

"Perhaps you are right. Just remember this: my gift of foresight, such as it is, must never be taken lightly. You might tell your sergeant that. I imagine he's afraid of nothing that walks."

"Quite right, *monsieur.* So far, we've kept a step ahead—both of us."

"Believe me, the warning is offered honestly. When that dead hand points the way—leave New Orleans at once. And see that your own hands are clean as you leave."

"Is that why you invited me to your office?"

"That is why, Captain," said the master of Duval's.

He was still smiling benignly at the stair-head as Carter crossed the polished stone floor between the gaming tables. At the archway that gave to the bar, and the Street of the Little Fathers, he paused to glance back. Duval was moving easily among his croupiers now, pausing for a word with each. The shoulders in the spotless white linen coat were erect with the man's own vigor; the eyes had the same quick sparkle as he paused to watch the house sweep a board at roulette.

If he can read the future like a book, thought Carter, he must have seen that sweep coming in advance. Then why does he smile? He had the answer as he walked into the dusk-dimmed street: Victor Duval took his pleasure, not in the predictable facts of life, but in humanity's ant-like scramble to avoid its own doom—or to profit from the doom of others.

It was a solemn burden for the shoulders of a brevet-captain—even if that brevet-captain had been graduated from West Point with honor. Only when he turned the corner into Royal Street, and saw the first lamps wink in the blue-gray evening, did he realize that he had accepted Duval's telepathy completely—with all its implications. And he shivered in that acceptance, despite the warmth of the growing dusk.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHICKEN-FEATHER CROSS

THE corridor that led to their rooms was more latticed verandah than hall. Each tall rectangle of window on the river side opened to the sunset, blood-red now above the serene face of the Mississippi, which all but lapped at the foot of the hotel gardens. Carter paused to breathe at the head of the stair—and stepped into one of the long French windows to watch the sunset fade on the western reaches of the river. When Grady called his name in the dusky depths of the hallway, he turned with a sudden wild thud of his heart. Grady was seldom excited; when his sturdy legs were inspired to run, there was urgency behind it.

"I've looked everywhere for you, Captain—"

"What's happened?"

"I'm not sure, yet. Quintero just came into my room, chattering like a marmoset with fleas. It seems that he found Don Enrique in a dead faint on the carpet—"

Like all his habitations, Don Enrique's palace suite at the Hotel Beau Séjour lived up to its name. His bedroom was enormous; Don Enrique himself looked small, despite his bulk, as he sprawled on the sea of Turkey carpet, halfway between bed and dresser. The night-light, burning faintly beside the bed, threw goblin shadows at the high ceiling, and gave the valance of the four-poster the air of a tent pitched in a cathedral. But it threw the pattern on the counterpane into almost garish relief. A crude cross in chicken-feathers, extending from head to foot board. Most of the feathers were stained with blood. It was evident that they had been arranged with care, despite the primitive design; a faint breeze from the river, lifting the pattern without changing its contour, showed that the feathers had been sewn carefully on two crossed strips of snake-skin.

"The voodoo cross," said Grady. "I'd faint too, if I found that on my bed in the dark. Tell the captain how it happened, Quintero."

The dwarf stepped out of the shadows, his face blue with fear. "It was here when I came to dress him, *señores*. He was already on the floor, as you see him now."

Carter knelt beside the prostrate figure. Even in his collapse, Don Enrique Canova was repulsive and faintly comic. In his small-clothes, with the white doormat of his chest tufting his open shirt, he resembled an oversize razorback more than ever. A glance told Carter that it was a simple faint. He stepped back as Grady came up with a water-pitcher, and dashed the contents into the face of the Florida Croesus. Don Enrique sat up with an indignant grunt, and wiped the water from his eyes.

"You aren't hurt?"

"I am a fool to faint, gentlemen. Give me a moment to clear my head."

Don Enrique got to his feet with ungainly ease, and sat down heavily in an armchair. Only then did Carter notice the letter clutched in one of his fists. The Spaniard offered it for his inspection, with a flourish.

"As you see, my old friend sends me not one calling card—but two."

Carter glanced at the letter—a formal request from Duval's restaurant, asking the pleasure of Don Enrique Canova's company at dinner tonight, as the guest of the owner. Don Enrique was all but smirking when Carter turned back to the armchair. His color was returning fast; when he got to his feet again, and reached for the decanter on his night-table, his step was almost steady.

"Do you look upon this thing as a joke, *señor?*"

"How else can I regard it?"

"Were you expecting an invitation to dine at Duval's?"

"He knows we must settle our accounts, now that I am in New Orleans. That is why I came. It is quite like him, to try and frighten me in advance."

Apparently he succeeded well enough, thought Carter. If you're blustering now, it's only because you've no other choice. You can't avoid accepting that dinner invitation—and what comes after. Your sins have come home to roost, and you've got to fight your way out, or die trying. He was scarcely impressed when Don Enrique crumpled the design of chicken-feathers, and flung it at his open window. That, too, was part of the Spaniard's braggadocio.

Quintero gave a gasp of pure animal terror, and cowered against the wall; even Carter felt his heart miss a beat as the lazy river breeze, spreading the cross like a giant fan, wafted it back into the frame of the window again—where it hung in perfect symmetry, the barbaric feathers blood-red with sunset. Don Enrique cursed adequately as he stamped across the room, tore the voodoo cross to shreds and ground the feathers into the carpet. Quintero all but dropped to his knees, as his master turned on him.

"*Caramba contigo,* idiot! Call that another omen, and I'll have your heart for breakfast!"

"Excellency, I pray it of you—do not go to Duval's tonight—" The slave was all but babbling now. Standing aside from the argument, Carter still had time to note how completely the roles were reversed. Faced with a tangible threat, Don Enrique seemed to grow in stature, like an uneasy bull-frog. Quintero, who had all but sneered openly at his master's fears aboard the *Natchez Belle*, seemed even more dwarfish as he cowered before this tongue-lashing.

"Bring my evening coat," said the Spaniard. "I will finish my dressing."

"But Excellency—"

"Bring me my coat, I say!" Don Enrique turned to Carter, as his body-servant scuttled into the dressing-room. "Your sergeant tells me that you, too, have received invitations to dine at Duval's. Naturally, that makes things simpler for us all."

Carter hesitated. "Consider, *señor*. Wouldn't it be wiser to meet Duval here, if you wish to confer on business matters?"

"I will meet him in his own den, and show him I am unafraid. Why should I fear him, with you two behind me?"

DON ENRIQUE inflated his white-tufted chest as he spoke. Carter watched him strut, and hoped that he had concealed his contempt. So we're in the open now, he thought. From your viewpoint, this is just a battle to the death between a pair of gold-plated hucksters—with the United States Army standing by to referee. For a moment, he played with the temptation to tell Don Enrique of his visit to Duval's—and its amazing aftermath. But of course he could hardly expect the Spaniard to believe him. A hard-headed trader like Don Enrique, who had planned this visit to the last detail, would merely brush the warning aside—as he had discarded the warning of a chicken-feather cross.

Standing before his pier-glass to admire the smooth drape of his clawhammer, Don Enrique glanced again at Duval's invitation. "We have been asked to dine at seven, gentlemen. Let's be on time."

Carter bowed, and followed Grady to the hall. Neither of them spoke until the door of their own quarters had closed behind them. The sergeant voiced his thoughts first, with his usual aplomb. The fact that a man had just received a death threat, almost under his eyes,

was something that Grady could accept without question. Death, in various forms, had bounced from the sergeant's tough hide for a long time.

"I'm looking forward to that dinner, Captain. What about yourself?"

Carter stripped off his coat irritably. For the first time, he noticed that his sergeant was already in faultless evening attire, save for coat and waistcoat. In a frilled shirt with pearl buttons, and a stock that crowded his jowls, Grady still managed to look the part. He could pass for a gentleman in any language, thought Carter. Even if his sideburn didn't hide the knife-wound he picked up years ago in Brooklyn, New York. Even if you guessed

Don Enrique lay sprawled on the sea of Turkey carpet between bed and dresser.

that he was carrying brass knuckles in the back pocket of those broadcloth pantaloons.

"I'll admit you're right on one count," he said. "Our friend's witch is real enough."

Grady listened with complete attention as Carter reviewed his meeting with Duval. "That clears up a great deal, doesn't it sir? I'll admit it's a relief to me to learn that Enrique was shamming aboard the *Natchez Belle*."

"He wasn't shamming that faint just now. Don't let his strutting deceive you, Grady. He's shivering under it."

"That I can believe, Captain. I still say he's made up his mind to meet Duval—on Duval's terms—and outface him, if he can."

"Haven't you heard a word I said?"

"I was all ears, sir. It must have given you a turn, when Duval mentioned that hand you played on the boat."

"Don't you see? If this gift is real—if he knows what Enrique is thinking before he thinks it—"

"You mean that Don Enrique is as good as dead now. Is that it, sir?"

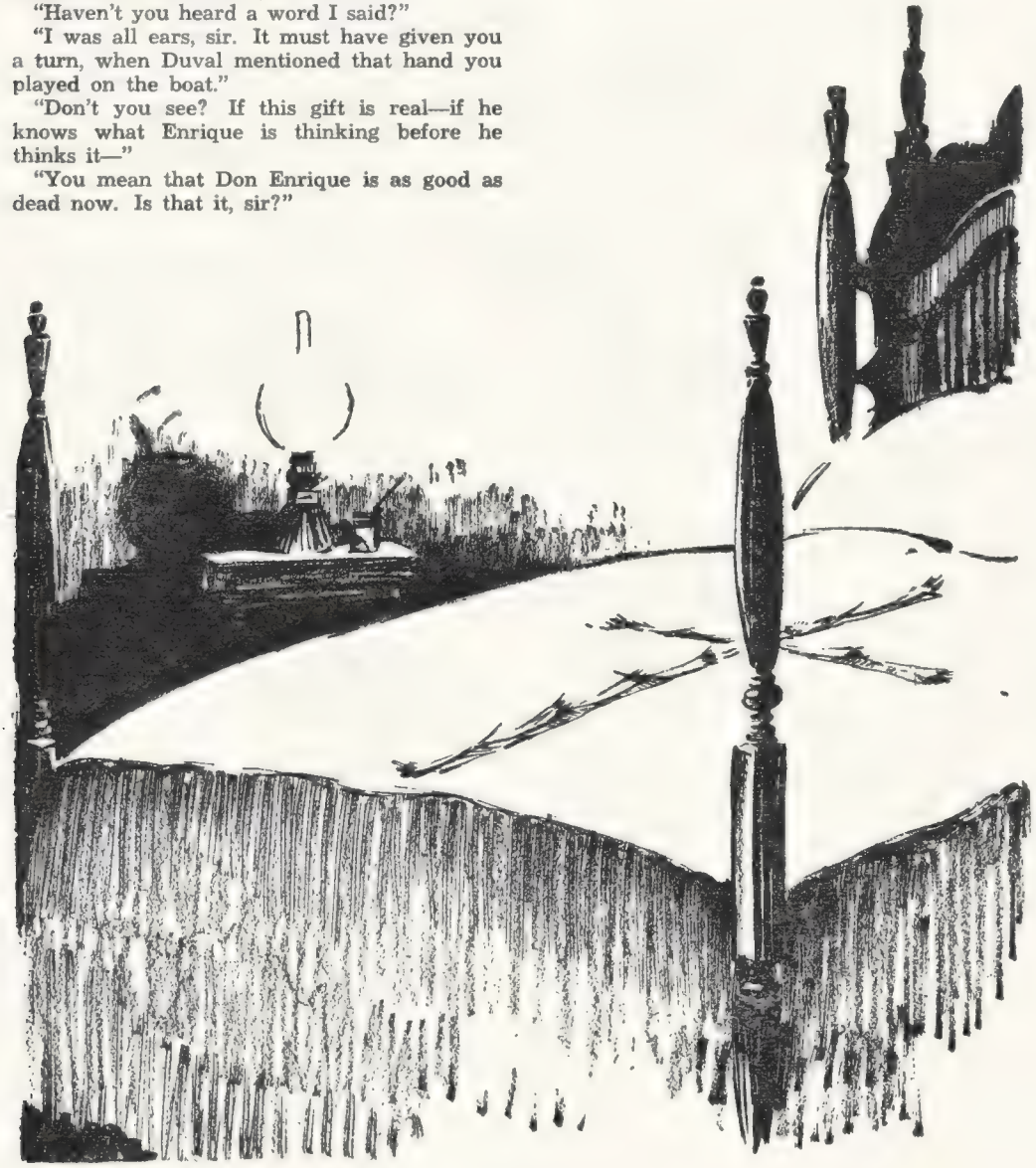
"Duval said he'd settle their score at the poker table. That Enrique would lose to aces over eights—and lose everything. Do you believe that threat is real?"

"If you do, sir."

"Then you believe in Duval's brand of telepathy?"

"I'd call it quite a help to any poker player."

Carter paced the room, and struck fist to palm. "I still say it can't be done. But he knew all about the time we serenaded Maria



Genovar on Charlotte Street. He knew that *you* were playing the guitar."

"So I was, sir. I've often said you couldn't carry a tune in a bucket."

"Stick to the point. Is Duval a mind-reader, or isn't he?"

Grady smoothed the velvet collar of Carter's evening coat, and fitted it snugly about his captain's shoulders. "We all believe in mind-readers, sir. If you ask me, most of us set ourselves up as amateurs in the trade. Duval's a professional—that's the only difference."

"Have you ever seen the trick work?"

"More than once, sir. And it isn't a trick—it's a gift. I remember a time in Port au Prince—"

"Never mind your visit to Haiti. Let's assume Duval has called the turn for this evening. Where does it leave us?"

"Right where we were, Captain. This is their fight, not ours."

"We're still on duty, as Don Enrique's bodyguard."

"Up to a point, sir."

"Just what does that mean?"

"Only that the general himself said you could draw the line. If Enrique steps over, that's his affair. For instance, if he tried to palm a card tonight—" Grady rolled his eyes to heaven. "The United States Army is expected to back an honest businessman. Not a cheat at poker."

Carter swallowed hard. Duval had said that Grady had been instructing Don Enrique in the fine points of the game. That could only mean the finer points of cheating.

"In other words, you agree with Duval?"

"I, for one, would hate to be caught cheating at his tables." Grady surveyed a mental picture all his own, and smiled broadly. "'Course, Enrique might be bull-headed enough to think he could manage it."

"And if he does?"

"Then we buy food from Duval's factors, for a change. It won't matter too much to the general. From what you say, he's a good man."

"Grady, you're a cynic."

"And you, sir, are a romantic."

"Be that as it may, I'm sure of this much. We are guarding a cheat. He'll try to cheat tonight."

"God help him if he does," said Grady cheerfully. "Shall we go and find out?"

CHAPTER V

DUEL—WITH CARDS

BOILED shrimps, served ice-cold and swimming in a deep and fragrant sauce. Pompano *duglère*, served with a dry white Chablis that revived its own memories of Paris. Venison steak, with soufflé potatoes and peas—and with it, a hearty Burgundy, poured reverently by Duval's *maître d'hôtel* from a cradled bottle. Now, a magnificent sherbet—and with it, champagne pale as angels' tears and heady as a devil's rigadoon.

Carter settled into a dreamy repletion in the midst of the crowded restaurant. It had been a perfect repast, marred but slightly by Don Enrique's porcine interest in the menu. Watching the alert black waiters bustle up with brandy inhalers and camembert, he wondered at his misgivings. He had forgotten that good food could be so magical—and so lulling in its magic. Perhaps this dinner was only groundbait; perhaps Victor Duval intended to bury the hatchet, after all. Just in time, he remembered the threat of that voodoo cross—and the poker party that must surely commence any moment now.

Don Enrique inspected the label on the brandy, and smacked his lips. "Vintage of 1803," he said. "Napoleon's own seal. Don't tell me *that* isn't an omen, Captain Carter."

Under the chandeliers, the Spaniard's cheeks glowed like winter apples. Wine had given him back a measure of his youth, along with his courage. Only the crafty spark in his eyes spoiled the picture as he held out his glass for more.

"I tell you, he's afraid of me—now that he's found I don't frighten easily. This brandy is his peace offering. He's bound to come to terms."

"May I ask what terms you had in mind?"

"It's no secret, Captain. He has tried to buy me out in Florida for years. I have done the same, here in Orleans. Tonight, we'll see who frightens first."

"At the poker table, Don Enrique?"

Their heads turned in unison to the new voice; only Grady dared to chuckle as Victor Duval sat down at their table. A black hand whipped forward to fill the glass he held out. His smile, as he sipped the world's best brandy, was happy as a child who has stumbled unexpectedly on an old playmate—and already relishes the fight in store. Turning to Don Enrique, Carter was surprised to find an identical echo of that smile. Surely it had been decades since the two old scoundrels had faced one another. It was hard to believe that hate—like innocence—could last so long, in all its first purity.

Duval said easily, "You will excuse the abruptness, Enrique? And the fact that your host has been so tardy? I happen to be a busy man."

"So am I, 'Gator." The Spaniard's flush had deepened—he all but spat Duval's old nickname across the table.

"But not too busy to enjoy your dinner, I hope?"

"I'm never too busy for that."

"Especially the shrimp. Boiled in seaweed, according to an old Minorcan recipe which I brought from Augustine. We made many such a meal on Anastasia Island, in the old days. When we were still friends, Enrique—or are you too old to remember when you had a friend?"

"Speak for yourself," said the Spaniard thickly.

Carter settled back, and glanced at Grady. So far, no voices had been raised—the two-way duel was all in the eyes. But there was no mistaking the barbed challenge that lay between the two.

Duval said, just as easily, "I suggested poker, Enrique. Perhaps you'll recall the last time we played poker together—even if you've forgotten my cooking lessons."

"I believe I won on that occasion."

"Perhaps your luck will hold tonight. Surely you know there's no other way to buy me out."

"I did not come to New Orleans to gamble, 'Gator."

"True. You came in the hope of cheating me again. This time, the game will be honest."

Watching Enrique narrowly, Carter saw the man's small eyes narrow in their ambush of fat. "Are your games always honest?"

"This one will be. You may choose your own dealer."

Carter held his breath as the blaze of Duval's glance met and locked with the Spaniard's. Don Enrique's eyes were the first to drop. He swayed a little as he got to his feet.

"Suppose I chose one of my friends?"

"That will do nicely."

"Will you join the party, Mr. Carter, and deal throughout?"

Carter swallowed hard, and rose in turn. Grady, he noted, had come to his feet in that exchange, and was observing the fulfillment of a prophecy with his grin intact.

"It will be a pleasure, gentlemen."

"Monsieur Duval—Mr. Carter." The Spaniard rumbled with laughter as Duval and Carter exchanged bows. "Mr. Carter is a friend of long standing. So is Mr. Grady, a manufacturer from Pittsburgh."

"I am honored, Mr. Grady," said Duval. "Would you care to round out the game?"

"Might I ask the stakes, sir?" Even Carter could admire the eagerness in the sergeant's voice. A lamb en route to slaughter could not have gamboled more convincingly than Mr. Grady, owner of hypothetical factories in Pennsylvania and New York.

"In my private rooms, Mr. Grady, the stakes are unlimited." Duval's tone held a gentle reproof. *"Ca va sans dire."*

"Then I'm your man."

"Mr. Grady won heavily on the trip down," said Enrique. "He fancies his skill."

"Mr. Grady will have a chance to prove himself tonight. Will you follow me, gentlemen?"

Their heads turned in unison to the new voice — it was Victor Duval.

So it was happening, as simply as that—precisely as Victor Duval had foreseen. Carter steadied himself against a chair, and watched the procession form—the proprietor and Don Enrique at the head, with Grady a nimble skip behind, and the *maître d'hôtel* shepherding a covey of waiters, each with a magnum of wine in a frosted silver bucket. Just in time, he remembered that he was an essential part of the contest that was forming, and hastened to bring up the rear.

ANOTHER cork popped. Carter watched the champagne smoke coldly into the four filigree glasses—and wondered if he would dare drink while those bubbles were still winking at him. He had been dealing for an hour now, with the precision of an automaton. It was still hard to believe that this pleasant, easy game was for blood. Or that this handsome room—its walls paneled in red silk, its mirrors echoing the round mahogany table and the four intent players who sat in deep armchairs about it—had witnessed the making and unmaking of a dozen fortunes.

He studied the faces as he shuffled for yet another deal. Grady sat on his left, as comfortably as though this were the parlor in his own home. Assuming, of course, that Grady had ever possessed a home of his own. Enrique's wattles had turned turkey-red long ago, thanks to the wine he had drunk. Yet he seemed calm enough, despite the sweat that had soaked through his shirt and stained the arms of his evening coat with purple patches. Duval, by contrast, was cool as the ice in his champagne bucket, and poised as a rapier. His perfect manners had never faltered, as he plied his guests with wine and compliments. From the first deal, he had bet with a precise rhythm, and piled a mountain of winnings before his place.

Two waiters completed the tableau—both of them moving like alert wasps about the table, at the first sign of an empty glass. Carter wondered again if the number of servants was excessive. He had guessed long ago that both Negroes were armed.

Duval, he noted grimly, had not been the only winner. Grady's hoard, stacked in neat blue smokestacks, was fully as large, and both hoards had come from the pocket of the St. Augustine Croesus. Yet Enrique had offered no protest, so far, beyond an elephantine belch or two. Carter shuffled with skill—a showy, accordion-shuffle, that Grady had taught him long ago. Perhaps the blow would fall with this deal. He could not doubt that it would come in time—or that aces over eights would win, precisely as Duval had foreseen. At this late date, it seemed futile to question any of the Frenchman's prophecies.

"Cards, Mr. Carter."

He slapped the deck on the table, and faced the dancing black eyes on his right. "*Captain* Carter, if you please. And the gentleman facing you across the table is Sergeant Grady. I think we've pretended long enough."

"So do I, Captain. The masquerade was quite needless. In fact, it betrays my friend Enrique's theatrical mind. I never expected him to face me without a bodyguard."

From the corner of one eye, Carter saw the two waiters move up quietly behind himself and Grady. But Duval waved them back with an easy gesture. "This is still a friendly game. Shall we keep it so?"

"What are you really after?"

"The Canova holdings in the Floridas, down to the last warehouse. The Canova good-will, in every town from the Perdido to the St. Johns. I shall win them tonight—at this table. Will you deal, Captain Carter?"

Enrique slapped the board at last—and the felt was wet with his sweat when he raised his arm. "I've had enough threats, 'Gator. Can you back that last one up?"

The Frenchman took out his wallet, and tossed a heavily-scrolled document on the table. "You'll find this in order, I think. My agents have estimated your holdings, to the last dollar. You'll find the figure entered, over my signature. Put your name down too, Enrique, and you cease to exist in Florida."

Enrique stared at the closely-written lines for a long time. "Is this an effort to buy me out?"

"Surely the price is fair."

"Suppose I admit as much. D'you think I'd sell?"

"Not for a moment. I propose to win that document from you, at this table. Put your name on it now, and place it in your wallet. Or lay it on the table now, and I'll match it in gold—and recover it on the turn of a card."

"You haven't enough gold to match this figure."

"There's more than enough, at Black Bayou. My check is good on any counter in New Orleans. Why shouldn't you accept it?"

Carter stiffened in his chair. He had heard of Duval's country estate—though some said that fortress was a better name for Black Bayou. It was even hinted that piracy was not dead on the river, thanks to the Frenchman's fleet of canoes that screened the water-lanes to the estate. That Lafitte's ghost had been known to roam the riverbank—and clank its chains in envy. . .

He turned back to the table at the sputter of a pen, and saw that Enrique was scratching his signature across the deed of transfer. Duval was writing just as busily on his side. Carter dared to lean forward, and blinked at the amount of the I.O.U. the Frenchman had just signed in a copper-plate hand.

"You can really begin to deal now, Captain."

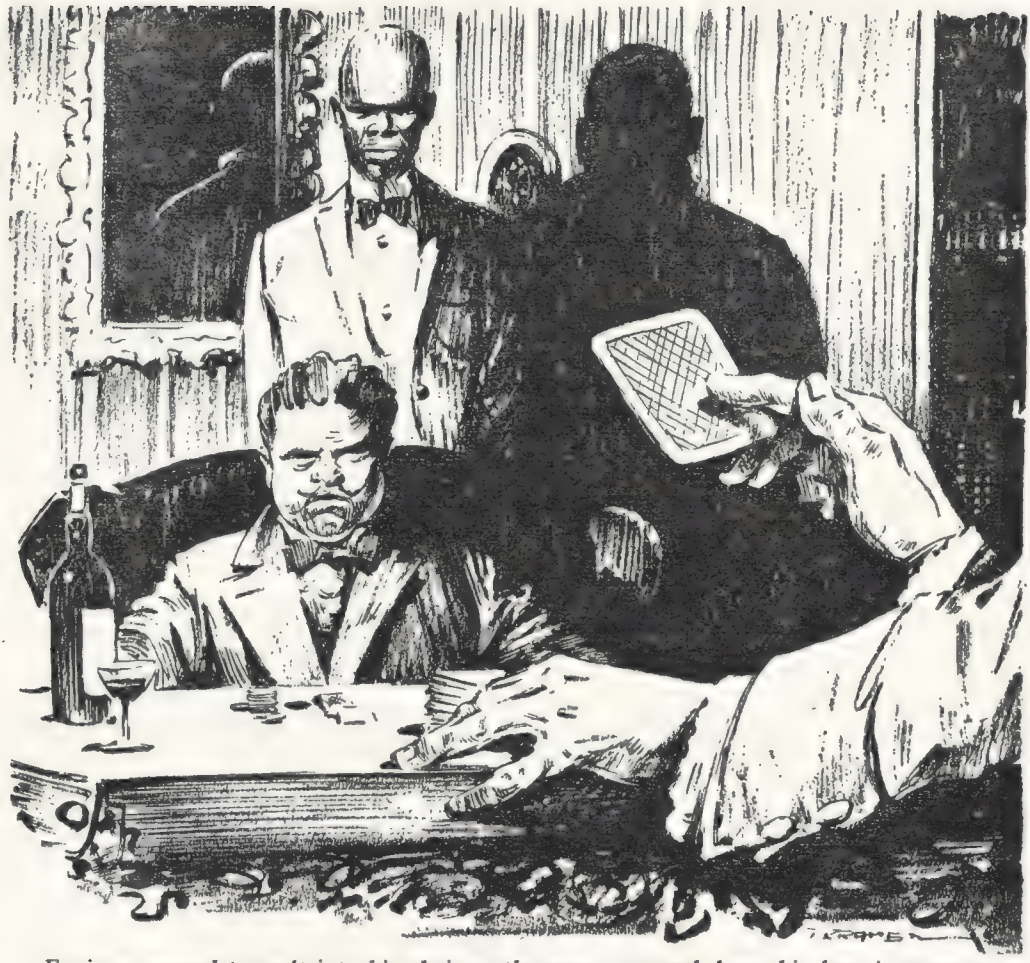
THIS is the hand, thought Carter. He could feel the cards burn his fingertips as he risked one more accordion shuffle. Duval watched him with detached amusement; now that the battle was joined in earnest, he seemed wonderfully cool, wonderfully assured. Enrique, on the contrary, seemed to melt into his chair as the sweat coursed down his face in streams. His hand was shaking as he held out his glass for more wine.

"*Sangre de Cristo!* Deal!"

Carter's hands seemed to move without his volition, to flip three hole-cards around the table—and three face up. A knave, a king, a trey. Grady bet instantly, as though that face-up jack was really wired to another in the hole. Enrique beamed at his king, saw the bet, and raised.

"*I* am high, Sergeant, if you please—"

Duval saw all bets, and raised again. "A buried ace is worth this, gentlemen. Will you prove you have knaves, Mr. Grady?"



Enrique seemed to melt into his chair as the sweat coursed down his face in streams.

The chips before the two winners were whittled down to minor mountains when Carter rapped the board with his knuckles, and dealt the next round.

"A queen, an eight, an ace—"

He felt himself choke on the last word. Had Duval really backed a holed ace on the last round? If so, he had paired, now. Or Enrique could have eights—the other half of the dead man's hand.

From that point, he found he was following the bets through a kind of haze. Before the next card could be dealt, the pot had pyramided—a red-and-blue mountain that forced Carter to rise and toss the cards above it.

A deuce to Grady—no help there. An ace to Enrique. A five to Duval. Carter felt his head swim in earnest. Would Enrique fill aces and eights—and not Duval? Had the Frenchman's prophecy reversed itself on its most vital point?

A servant entered the poker room, with a mahogany box containing serried rows of chips. Carter was vaguely aware that Enrique was now forced to borrow from the house, using the deed of transfer as a basis for the credit. He tried hard to focus on details, but his mind was too taut. Only the deck of cards was real—and the fact that he held destiny between his fingers. Death sat at ease in this quiet room, with all the grace of a hooded snake. Glancing at Victor Duval, Carter found the simile complete. A graceful snake, he added—who would strike in his own good time.

It was Duval who sifted the remaining chips through lazy brown fingers—Duval who asked crisply that he complete the deal.

"A knave—an ace—an ace—"

Carter held his breath as he checked the board. Grady, with two knaves now on top. Enrique—he blinked, then looked again—with paired aces showing beside a king and an eight,

Duval, with the second pair of aces beside a five and a three. The Frenchman could hardly have been betting on an ace in the hole; nor could he better two pair now. If Don Enrique Canova sat behind the dead man's hand, he would sweep the board.

"Knaves, aces and aces showing. The first pair of aces bet."

Enrique pondered his hand, then checked the bet. Duval offered them all his best host's smile. The hooded eyes, darting over the exposed cards, seemed to read the two covered pasteboards with the same ease. Carter let his hands relax on the felt, at long last. Watching the Frenchman make a neat phalanx of his remaining chips, and push them to the center, he knew that the gesture spelt Enrique's doom. Or so Duval had planned, from the beginning.

His eyes swung to Grady. It would be quite like his sergeant to make three of a kind, and leap in now for the kill in defiance of every warning. But Grady only shrugged, and tossed in his hand.

"The pleasure's all yours, gentlemen."

Carter watched Enrique finger his cards, and take a furtive look at the buried pasteboard. Duval had turned away from the table, to accept a glass of wine. The Spaniard's sausage-thick fingers were agile, after all—Carter did not speak as he saw the hole-card slide forward, then back.

Had Enrique palmed his hole-card, and substituted another? He would never know, now. He knew only that Duval's *maître d'hôtel* was behind the Spaniard's chair, watching with the gimlet thoroughness of the born waiter. If Don Enrique is cheating, he thought, Duval's staff is aware of it. Is it possible that Duval intends to let him win, deliberately?

The Frenchman came suavely back to the game again, and beamed at his old enemy over the wine.

"Bet your last marker, my friend—and give Captain Carter the deed of transfer, for safekeeping. I will do the same with my I.O.U."

THE sweat dripped from Enrique's forehead, staining the back of the hole-card, and blurring the two exposed aces like pale quicksilver. If he's cheating, thought Carter, he can die for it, before he lifts that fat stern from the chair. If Duval's *maître d'hôtel* saw a card drop from his sleeve now, or earlier in the play—he's a marked man, as surely as the card itself is marked. But there was no hesitation in Enrique's paws as he shoved his last chip forward.

"*I'm* calling *you*, 'Gator."

"Your courage pays handsomely, Enrique. The pot is yours."

No one spoke as Carter exposed the Spaniard's hole-card. Aces over eights, the dead man's hand—though Enrique had topped Duval on the board.

"I feared as much," murmured Duval. "It seems I am paying for this poker party, after all." He smiled at Grady, with that same flawless politeness. "How did you fare, Sergeant?"

"Believe it or not, I broke even," said Grady.

"Too bad. In a way, that is more discouraging than losing. Will you take these documents, Captain?"

Carter's hands were shaking as he folded the deed into his wallet, along with the Frenchman's I.O.U. Enrique was on his feet long ago, his monstrous midriff cramping against the table as he embraced the mountain-high pot.

"I go to Black Bayou this midnight," said Duval. "If you gentlemen wish, I will settle before morning."

Enrique cackled with laughter. "Don't think I'd risk my neck."

"No one suggested that you take risks," said Duval. "Captain Carter holds my I.O.U. in your behalf. As I say, it's as good as a check in New Orleans—but most banks would be hard put to pay out a quarter-million in specie, at this hour." He smiled at Carter—a gentle, old man's smile. "The money is yours, Captain, whenever you wish to call. Can I offer you a stirrup-cup? I'm afraid it's past our closing time."

"I've had enough," said Enrique. Suddenly, with a flail-like gesture, he swept the last chip to the floor, and wavered to his feet. "More'n enough," he said thickly—and staggered to the door. "Keep your chips, 'Gator. I've won That I.O.U. in Carter's pocket. You have to cash it, the Army'll see to that. Only you *can't* cash it 'thout ruining yourself. You haven't a quarter-million in gold, and you needn't pretend y'have."

"Come to Black Bayou, Captain," said Duval patiently. "You'll have your answer."

He got up on that, and walked to the door where Enrique still tottered like an over-size Buddha hung on an invisible spring. Watching, and marveling, Carter saw that the Frenchman's bounce was unimpaired. It showed in every taut line of his body as he bore down on Enrique—elbowed him from his path with one easy shove—and left the room.

"Just for that," roared Enrique, "I'll collect tonight."

CHAPTER VI

DEAD MAN'S HAND

IN THE carriage, rolling up Royal Street in the blue moonlight, he could not risk a question. Grady sat serenely in his corner, with his eyes on the coachman's back; Enrique snored off the last of the wine between

them, and rumbled deep in his tun-belly between snores. Yet the Spaniard might waken at a word; the coachman himself might well be in Duval's employ.

Grady himself broke the silence. "Our friend is a good loser. I'll go further. Our friend is a miracle."

"Who says he's our friend?"

"I'm sure of it, now. Otherwise, we'd all be dead."

"Perhaps we deserve to be." Carter edged away from the sleeping Enrique, whose snores had eased off in volume. His lips framed the question after all. Grady could read lips with ease, even by moonlight. It was a trick they had taught one another in bivouac, when an untoward whisper might carry to enemy ears beyond their fire.

"Did he win fairly?"

Grady answered, just as silently. "I wouldn't know, Captain."

"Come out of ambush. Did you see him palm a card?"

"When an expert palms cards, you don't notice it. Or if you do, it happens just once."

"You gave him lessons, and you know it!" Carter insisted.

"Lessons, sir?" The sergeant's whiskey-pale eyes were round with virtue, and indignation. "Put it the other way, if you don't mind. This hogshead has give us a lesson tonight."

"That remains to be seen. We've still to collect."

"Duval pays his debts, I'm told."

"I thought he'd pay this one another way." Carter relapsed into gloomy silence as the carriage crossed the palm-bordered Promenade Publique that bounded the Quarter on the north, and swung toward the river—and their hotel. If Grady was nursing a secret, he would reveal it in his own way, or not at all.

He was still brooding over that well-remembered fact when the coachman whipped his horses up the hotel driveway in a final flourish of speed. At least, it was a relief to dig an elbow into Enrique's well-padded ribs.

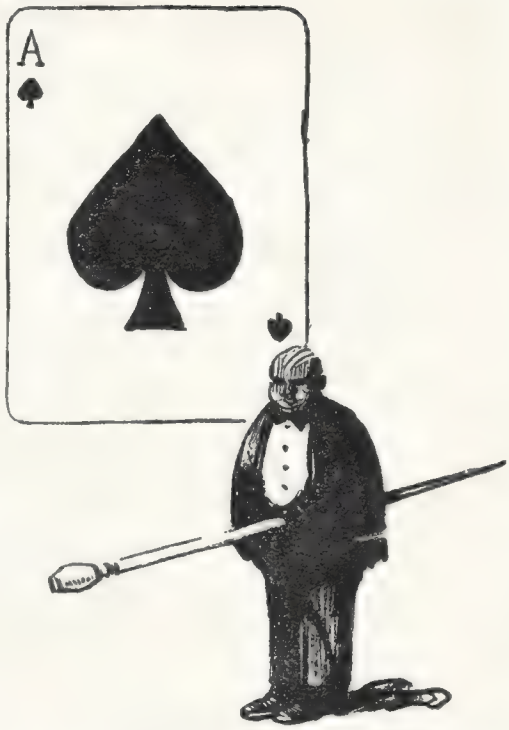
"Wake up! You can sleep off your triumph in bed."

But Enrique slept on, with his mouth gaping wide as his head lolled back against the upholstery. He was still asleep when Grady jumped down to the carriage-block and offered his hand.

"Call the night porter," snapped Carter. "I'm damned if I carry him to bed."

"Right again, sir. He looks like quite a load—especially in this state."

Carter jabbed again with a savage elbow, then struck a lucifer and held it above Don Enrique's face. Not even a faint rumble answered him; the eyes that stared back at him were glassy with repose. The sort of repose that no amount of prodding could disturb.



It was a fat clay doll, grotesquely like Don Enrique himself, with a silver bodkin thrust deep into its rotund belly.

"I'll call the porter anyhow," said Grady. "This is worth a witness."

With the black major-domo at one of Enrique's feet, and the coachman at the other, they were able to ease him to the hotel porch at last. Carter's last doubts were swept away when he watched the Spaniard's head roll on his shoulders. A doll with a broken neck could not have been more inert in death.

"When did it happen?"

"If you ask me, sir, it was a stroke. Caught him quiet-like, on account of the wine—and his fat."

"Never mind that—you know what I mean!"

"Come now, Captain," said Grady reprovingly. "You said you didn't believe in witches."

But it was Grady who stood aside after all, when the coachman backed down the steps, and scurried to his carriage like a homing banshee. When the major-domo ran into the hotel with a muted scream to search out a doctor—though no doctor was needed now—only Carter remained at the side of what had once been the Florida Croesus.

For a long time, he stared down at the object Grady had just taken from Don Enrique's ulster pocket. A fat clay doll, grotesquely like

Don Enrique himself. A doll in evening dress, with a snip of white hair slicked neatly across its bulging bald forehead, and a silver bodkin thrust deep into its rotund belly.

AFTER the doctor had gone, the bedroom seemed quiet and dark, as befits a resting-place of the dead. Thanks to the night-light, and the tall shadows it cast, the four-poster on which Don Enrique was lying resembled a bier rather than a bed. But nothing could give the Spaniard a dignity to balance his background. Don Enrique might lie in state, but he was an over-dressed razorback, even now.

Carter paced the carpet one more time, and tried hard not to stare at the hulk on the bed. Grady, straddling a chair with easy aplomb, waited for an explosion from his superior. So far, Carter was still too dazed to pin down his mind with words. Try as he might, he could not escape the conviction that this had been planned from the beginning—including their midnight vigil. That Don Enrique's death, at this precise moment, was as inevitable as the magnet that had drawn him to Duval's private poker room tonight.

"Galloping apoplexy," said Grady. "Brought on by excitement and drink. That's the sawbones' verdict, sir. Why not accept it?"

"Aren't you forgetting what we found in his pocket?"

"The effigy, sir? I'll admit that gave me a nasty turn. My guess is, he didn't even know it was there. People still die of strokes—or slow poison."

"Are you suggesting Duval poisoned him?"

"Never in this world. Duval *knew* it would end this way. As you see, aces over eights won for him after all."

"I still have his I.O.U."

"You're still thinking of cashing it?"

Carter's pacing took on an added tempo. "How does Duval know I won't?"

"That's his secret too, sir. *If I were you, I wouldn't go too near that bed.*"

Grady's last remark was no less startling, spoken with silent lips. Carter spun on his toes, and quartered the carpet before he answered in kind.

"*Why not?*"

"*Keep talking, sir. Aloud. You'll see why later.*"

"I've a right to cash the I.O.U.," said Carter. "If the game was fair, I've every right—"

"Go to Maxim's with it tonight—or to LaRue's, or any gambling house on Royal Street. You could cash it for half its value, without even giving your name. Maybe I'm not the only one who's thinking of that right now, sir."

Carter scowled at Grady, and continued his pacing—though he avoided the high dais of the bed by instinct now. He knew that Grady would develop the bizarre thought in his own way, or not at all. Including the alleged menace that lurked above—or below—the remains of Don Enrique Canova.

"Who else could know that Enrique planned to bring back Duval's I.O.U. for a quarter-million?"

"The one person you've overlooked—Quintero."

Carter pulled up sharply. It was true, he had quite forgotten Enrique's body-servant in the bustle of the doctor's arrival and departure.

"Don't be deceived by his size, sir," said Grady. "In my opinion, Quintero is the best actor of the lot, and the smartest planner. I say he had Enrique marked for dead from the start, win or lose. If Enrique lost, Quintero would take what was left; if he won, he planned to snatch that I.O.U. from the body, cash it tonight somewhere, and leave town like greased lightning."

"Start that from the beginning, can't you?"

"The beginning goes back a lot of years, sir. First off, Quintero is not a slave, though the fact isn't generally known in Augustine. He bought his freedom when he still lived with the Seminoles; Enrique himself confirmed it, when he took him as a silent partner. That business with the cotton umbrella in the Plaza was just a pose, to cover that dwarf's skulduggery. Or should I just say that there are places an elephant can't go, where a monkey can manage nicely?"

"How do you know he planned to finish Enrique here tonight?"

"Because Enrique *is* finished. Because no one but Quintero could have put that mud doll in his pocket. Because he slept under Enrique's bed in Augustine, like a monkey under his organ. My guess is he's hiding there now—hoping we'll leave him alone with the man he killed—"

Carter reeled under the slap, and went down. Grady, in the act of slapping, had rolled with his swing, to thrust the pair of them into the ambush of a divan that stood across the room from the four-poster. The dart winged past Carter's ear with a scant inch to spare. For a second, as he hugged the carpet, he watched it quiver in the wall—saw a second missile, aimed viciously low, skim the carpet as it sought their hiding-place.

"See what I mean, sir?"

The sergeant, on hands and knees, had already maneuvered to a vantage point between divan and wall. Now, with both elbows rock-firm on the carpet, he leveled his service pistol at the precise spot where the ornate velvet skirts of the four-poster's counter-pane swept the floor.

"Two seconds to come out, Quintero. Toss that blow-gun out first, if you please."

CARTER sucked in his breath as Grady pulled back the hammer of his pistol with a practiced thumb. There was no sound in the curtained space between bed-springs and floor. Only the whisper of a blow-gun on the carpet, as it rolled into sight, looking for all the world like a child's flute. Carter put out a hand to snatch it. He had dodged those darts before in the 'Glades; he could not doubt that the wicked steel point still vibrating in the wall was poisoned to its feathered tail.

"Come out, monkey!"

The sound was more rat-like than simian as Quintero burst into view with his hands up. A queer, huddled figure of a man, stripped to the waist, his brown skin daubed with dust. Carter rose with Grady, as the dwarf backed against the wall. In the French windows behind them, the dark seemed to stir with their rising.

Carter saw, with no particular surprise, that a half-dozen men had taken shape in the blue wash of moonlight, where the vines of the balcony gave to the open arabesque of iron-work. One of them was Duval's *maître-d'hôtel;* he recognized two of the table-waiters who had served them at dinner. All of them moved with the easy certainty of men closing at a prearranged signal. Duval himself was merely the logical climax as he strolled into the room, and inspected Quintero incuriously.

"You were thorough, my friend," he murmured—and the murmur seemed to include the man against the wall, and the hulk on the four-poster. "But not thorough enough. When you planned to fleece me, you should have paused to learn that I own this hotel."

"Come in, mister," said Grady cheerfully. "He's all yours."

"Your pardon, Sergeant, he is all *yours*. You and Captain Carter are the mourners at this wake." He glanced again at Quintero, and then settled easily on the divan. "It was clever of you, to guess he would take refuge under the bed. I never would have thought of that. Cleverer still, to guess that our friend from Augustine died of slow poison—with, perhaps, a few overtones of black magic."

Quintero tried to speak, but no words came. Only an incoherent babble that brought back Grady's simian metaphor. Duval offered the dwarf his most indulgent smile.

"You ask me how I know you gave him poison before he left tonight? I will call back the doctor, to open his stomach and verify my statement. We'll compare the findings with the stone bottle you have in your back pocket now."

Quintero scuttled for the window, with his knuckles to the floor. Duval nodded to Grady, but the sergeant shrugged, and lowered his gun. The *maître d'hôtel* struck downward with the heel of his hand, as the dwarf tried to burst through the cordon on the balcony. Quintero lapsed to the floor without a sound.

"Don't look so startled, Captain," said Duval. "A man in my position can afford to sit comfortably in the dark, and wait for fate to complete its pattern." He rose and walked over to the bed, to stare down at the body. "Poor Enrique, I'm afraid he died happy after all. I'm sure he died unregenerate—"

Carter broke in, despite himself. "You said the dead man's hand would win."

"And so it has—in a way none of us could foresee. Must I add that Enrique's buried card—his other eight—was not an eight originally? He dealt it out of his cuff. Which means, of course, that the final pot was mine. I'll trouble you for my I.O.U., Captain Carter—as well as that deed of transfer."

Carter passed over both papers without a word. Duval glanced at the deed, and tucked it negligently into his pocket. The I.O.U. he twisted into a cone, and used as a spill to light a cheroot he produced from a hand-tooled leather case. "A pleasant evening, gentlemen. Thank you both—for deserving that title."

But Carter stopped him on the threshold of the French window. "What about Quintero?"

"Remember, I own this hotel. A murder was plotted here. It is my responsibility to see that justice is done."

"You mentioned a warning. Another dead man's hand."

"Look to the bed, Captain Carter. It is pointing at you now."

Carter whirled—and felt the hair rise on his head. Don Enrique's body, stiffening in the rigor of death, had seemed to stir. One arm, that had rested on his chest a moment before, described a slow arc now, until it lay rigid and all but free of the bed. As Duval said, the stiff fingers seemed to be leveled at his heart.

"I hardly think the warning is permanent, Captain. When you're in New Orleans again, will you consider yourself my guest?"

IN THE milky wash of the lower delta, with a half-moon of sea already opening to the chunk of her paddles, the side-wheeler *City of Memphis* swam toward the sunset. Pensacola-bound, she was properly disdainful of the smaller craft that danced in her wake. A white witch with proud colors flying, she seemed only too happy to spurn these muddy river waters for the open Gulf.

Brevet-Captain John Carter, standing at the rail to watch the land fade into the afterglow, flexed his shoulders gratefully in the tight uniform coat—and accepted a light for his cigar from the sergeant who stood, with proper deference, at his elbow.

(Continued on page 146)

ILLUSTRATED
BY
L. STERNE STEVENS

SWORD

LAND

By HENRY JOHN COLYTON

THE STORY THUS FAR:

IN THE years 1169-71, Ireland was invaded by a handful of Norman knights, men-at-arms and Welsh archers—less than a thousand men all told—the Norman adventurers having been brought there by DERMOT MAC MURROUGH, ex-king of Leinster, with the promise of land as a reward for their assistance in putting down his enemies. Among the bold company who set out for Ireland to fight for the Irish chieftain—with the indifferent sanction of their king, HENRY II of England—were SIR BRIAN FITZ-BRIAN, his friends EDMUND DE ST. ERNE and MILO DE CLYDACH, FITZ-STEPHEN, DE PRENDERGAST, DE BARRI, MOUNTMAURICE, the GERALDINES and other impoverished noblemen lured by the chance for quick riches and power in a new land.

The story is told, many years later, by Fitz-Brian who calls himself "a mongrel if there ever was one"—his Welsh blood gave him a good singing voice, his Norse blood unusual stature and brawn, and his English blood the thick-headedness that kept him from knowing when he was licked and let him go blundering along when a more sensible man would curl up and die. Being, in his forty-first year, confined to bed with serious injuries sustained during the jousting at the Earl of Gloucester's tournament, he decides to set down "a true account of the Irish wars"—during which he lost his left hand—"and dealing particularly with the treachery of MAC BREAGH, chief of Ballinmish, and his brother ABBOT AYMON of Killanore, the massacre at Dun Cathach, and the remarkable deeds of the LADY CEREDWIN DE MORREISE . . ."

The long winter after the first perilous crossing of the Normans from Bristol has come to an end. The invaders have spent the first months since their landing on the bleak deserted coast at Dun Cathach restoring the ruins of an old fortress there, in preparation for the

The noise was terrific—both sides yelling their war-cries, axes whanging on shields, and the short dull sound of steel hitting sinew and bone.

operations to come. Early that spring, during a terrible storm, a ship breaks up within sight of the ramparts of Dun Cathach—on the cruel rocks known as the Teeth of Leir—and Fitz-Brian and Milo brave the sea to rescue the survivors, among them being the abbot of Killanore, the lovely Lady Ceredwin de Morreise, and her father SIR ROBERT DE MORREISE. Fitz-Brian, with the assistance of EADMER, his attendant and confidant, fits out the bedraggled girl with some of his own clothing and discovers that she knows him—having watched him joust at the Winchester tourney when she was a youthful novice at St. Milburgh's. Fitz-Brian attempts to make love to her and is shocked to learn that she is betrothed to the abbot of Killanore's brother—the fierce and hairy chief of Ballinmish, Conn Mac Breagh, who is reputed to have one wife already. Meanwhile, the haughty abbot has offered sanctuary to Morreise, who is in disfavor with King Henry.

Three days later, Mac Breagh turns up to take Ceredwin, her father and the abbot back to Ballinmish. He shows his gratitude to Fitz-Brian for rescuing his bride-to-be by presenting him with a pair of magnificent Irish horses. Fitz-Brian secretly gives Ceredwin his dagger and watches her leave in the company of Mac Breagh with misgivings—and jealousy.

Soon after their departure a messenger from Mac Murrough rides up with the news they have been awaiting: Fitz-Stephen has anchored in the mouth of the Bannow nearby with a ship full of armed men, and the trouble is about to begin! Next day, the Normans join forces with Dermot Mac Murrough and his gallowglasses—Irish foot-soldiers armed with vicious short-handled axes—and they set out to lay siege to the walled town of Wexford, a small burgh on the seacoast south of Dublin. As they approach the fortifications, an armed mob boils out of the town to meet them—but takes to its heels after a volley from the deadly bows of the Welsh archers. Most of the townsmen gain the security of the walls and the siege is on. The Normans fill in the deep ditches surrounding the fortifications, bring up scaling ladders and the armored attackers start to swarm up the walls. Fitz-Brian is nearing the top, amid showers of rocks thrown by the defenders, when the ladder gives way and he hurtles to the bottom of the ditch to land with a sickening crash. . . .

PART II

I WAS jarred considerably, but not hurt. My nose was bleeding, though, and when Eadmer saw that, he went after me as if he were digging out a badger, and dragged me out of the ditch by the leg when I was still too dazed to clout him one. He hove me up on his back and lugged me back of the horse-lines, and sloshed a bucket of water over me, like an idiot.

I sat up, wiping my nose and swearing. "Don't you know any better than to throw water on a chain-mail hauberk, you double-damned fool?" I yelled, the sky flapping around my head like a pennon. "Want to rust a hundred marks' value off of it, huh?"

He stood over me, his knuckles on his hip-bones, his horse-face grim and disgusted. "I *was* a damned fool, my lord," he said. "I ought to 'a' noticed that you'd lit on your head, and wasn't in no danger."

I ignored that, and got to my feet, wiping my nose again. Around me I heard the steady twang, twang of bowstrings and Welsh bad language.

"What happened?" I demanded.

"Ladder broke," he explained. "Any ladder would when it's got four men in mail on it, and three of 'em knot up in the same place. I told 'em to go up, but that smart cousin of de Prendergast's, he saw de Barri take a dive, and he started back down in a hurry, and the other two tried to beat him to it, and she broke, that's all."

"Anybody hurt?" I asked, mopping off my mail with what had been my new silk surcoat. "Who's dead?"

"Several," he said grimly. "De Barri's alive—his skull's as thick as yours—but there's a dozen or so killed. The archers are still at it, but Fitz-Stephen ordered the rest of us to withdraw for a bowshot's length."

"St. Erne?" I gulped.

"All right, only upset. But we ain't done yet."

Our first assault had failed. But Eadmer was right. We hadn't finished yet. We drew off, and circled the walls, and made for the harbor. It was full of small vessels—fishing boats and traders—deserted mostly, for their owners had taken shelter inside the walls. We fired them, to cut off any possible escape for reinforcements. By that time it was nightfall, and we returned to our camp, the blazing vessels lighting a path for us. Our party from Dun Cathach was in good order, except for scrapes and bruises, for St. Erne and I inspected all of them and their equipment.

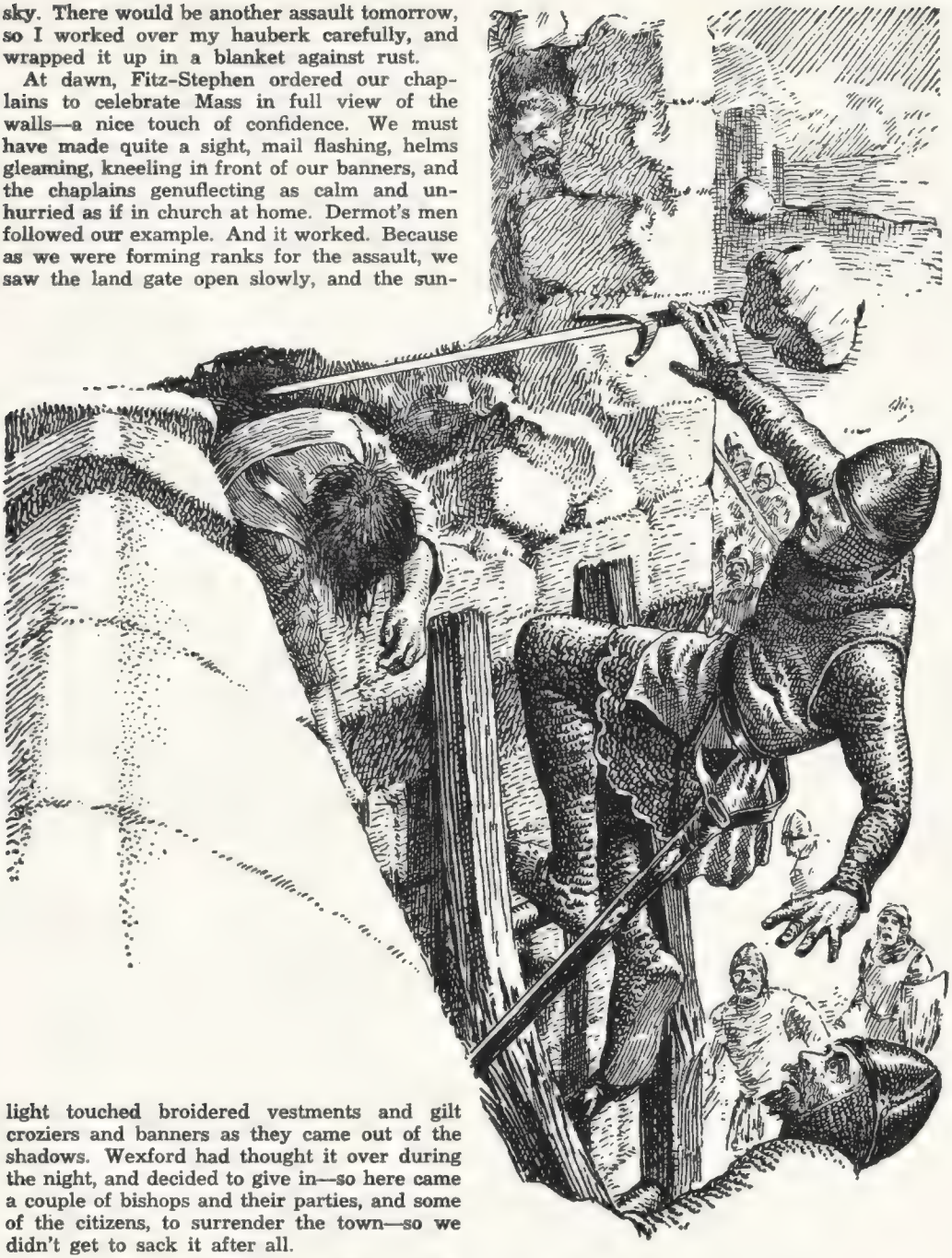
"Mac Murrough was disappointed," St. Erne told me, "but Fitz-Stephen calmed him down, O'Gallin says. I tried to get somebody to take up my bet that the city would fall tomorrow, but there weren't any takers—not even Mountmaurice."

Well, that sort of spirit helps things along. We ate and drank hearty, and the Welshmen got to singing, and in between songs, you could hear a sort of dim murmuring behind the walls that rose black against the fire-reddened

sky. There would be another assault tomorrow, so I worked over my hauberk carefully, and wrapped it up in a blanket against rust.

At dawn, Fitz-Stephen ordered our chaplains to celebrate Mass in full view of the walls—a nice touch of confidence. We must have made quite a sight, mail flashing, helms gleaming, kneeling in front of our banners, and the chaplains genuflecting as calm and unhurried as if in church at home. Dermot's men followed our example. And it worked. Because as we were forming ranks for the assault, we saw the land gate open slowly, and the sunlight touched broidered vestments and gilt croziers and banners as they came out of the shadows. Wexford had thought it over during the night, and decided to give in—so here came a couple of bishops and their parties, and some of the citizens, to surrender the town—so we didn't get to sack it after all.

Dermot was delighted, of course, and he gave Wexford to Fitz-Stephen immediately after the surrender, with the bishops as witnesses, and everybody whooping and cheering, and Fitz-Stephen grinning as he knelt to do homage to his new liege for his new territory. Mac Murrough passed out rewards



"The ladder broke," Eadmer explained. "Any ladder would when it's got four men in mail on it, and three of 'em knot up in the same place."

all around. Presently St. Erne was kneeling before him to receive Dun Cathach in formal style before witnesses, and I saw his nose wrinkle as Dermot kissed him.

At the suggestion of Fitz-Stephen, Dermot gave territory to Mountmaurice, who was looking sour, and hinting that King Henry might not like it if he heard how much power Fitz-Stephen was getting. I always thought that fellow was a sneaking spy of the king's, and he could die piously in a monastery fifty times, and I still wouldn't trust him.

I tried to blow a tune out of an Irish bagpipe, so that the pack of them nearly burst themselves laughing.

When the ceremonies were over, Dermot addressed us all fervently in Erse, and O'Gallin said, "The king asks you gentlemen and your forces to come with him to his city of Ferns, to refresh yourselves—and plan the next assault."

Well, we didn't need a rest, but we were ready to refresh ourselves. I was amused at St. Erne, though. Here we'd lived at Dun Cathach all winter, and you'd think he knew the place by now, but now that he was properly enfeoffed with it, and it was legally his, he was bursting to get back and look it over. So that afternoon he rode away with the men, back to our fortress.

"I ought to relieve Sir Milo and the others," he said solemnly. "I'll send 'em on to Ferns with you, Fitz-Brian. Have a good time."

So we went to Ferns with Dermot and his yelling tribesmen, and our progress was slowed considerably by the swarms of his subjects who had thought back and decided they wanted to be his faithful liegemen again. Dermot forgave them, and levied tributes and hostages all around, and when we got to Ferns, he threw a huge feast for us in his royal hall—a sprawling building of wickerwork and mud. We had a very good time. Dermot had a large collection of daughters, all pretty, and all willing and eager to entertain us. Aoife, that we called Eva for convenience, was the beauty of them all—and although I couldn't speak Erse any more than she could speak French, we enjoyed each other's company—and no politics about it, either. I tried to be prudent as possible, but I had a wonderful time. Fitz-Stephen and Dermot were planning an attack on Ossory, whose chieftain hadn't caught on yet to the new state of things, and I should have been in the council party, but Lord! I was playing chess with one girl, or listening to another touch the harp and sing, very sweetly too, or else I was trying to blow a tune out of an Irish bagpipe, so that the pack of them nearly burst themselves laughing. And their heads clustered around me like a garland of flowers—long hair of black silk, or pale gold, or ruddy copper, fresh complexions, bright eyes, and the silken whisper of their gowns—why, it fairly made me drunk, after that long dull winter! So that when Milo arrived, he was disgusted with me—but Milo had always been horribly shy with girls.

So the days passed, and chieftains, big and little, came swarming in to swear allegiance to Dermot as the story of the fall of Wexford got around. One day I went hunting with O'Gallin, and when we came back, we saw a knot of warriors dismounting at Dermot's gate; I wasn't paying much attention, for O'Gallin and I were talking about breeds of hounds.

Suddenly O'Gallin broke off his speech, and said, "And whatever have ye done to the Mac Breagh, Fitz-Brian, that he looks at you with murder in his eyes?"

I looked, and sure enough, there was the Mac Breagh, dismounting from a superb bay stallion. The look in his green eyes made my neck prickle—but he smiled broadly when he saw me, and crossed the space between us, his hand extended. I didn't understand what he said, of course, except that he called me "Mac Brian," but we embraced like two brothers. I told him that the horses he had given me were splendid creatures—which was truth.

O'Gallin interpreted, "He says he's delighted. He says they are of the true Irish breed, that will never bear a saddle—"

"The hell they won't," I grinned. "They're bearing saddles now—I rode Boru yesterday, recall. Ask him how his wife is, O'Gallin."

O'Gallin said, smiling pleasantly all the while, "I will do no such thing, Fitz-Brian. She is now his property, and he will resent any such question, and it will not be yourself that suffers for it."

I got it, so I said, "Well, ask him how Sir Robert de Morreise is."

They gabbled for some time, and I reflected that I must learn some Erse. At last O'Gallin said, "He says Sir Robert is well, and honored of the chieftains of Limerick and Ormond."

"All that racket, and only so much French comes out of it?"

"Ye should recall, Fitz-Brian, that our tongue is full o' poetry, and in your stiff French its beauty is clean gone." But although he grinned at me, his eyes were uneasy, and his brows crawled back and forth like wooly-worms gone crazy. "He doesn't have any liking for ye, so he doesn't. He was after asking me if it was true they call ye the handsomest man in Leinster, and I'm thinkin' he plans to spoil yer looks for ye."

My slandered face heated up, and I swore, and then I asked, "He said nothing of Lady Ceredwin?"

"He said nothing, Fitz-Brian. And if I were ye, I'd not be turnin' me back on the lad, if ye don't want to find a knife in it."

He turned then, and spouted Erse at Mac Breagh. I noticed that the chief had stopped shaving—the honeymoon, if any, must be over. I thought of Ceredwin, and then I abruptly stopped myself. It would do no good. We had business on our hands, and if King Dermot could lose Leinster for running off with another man's wife, what would befall a knight-bachelor who pulled the same trick in a foreign land in time of war? There were so few of us, and the task ahead was great. But my heart kept reproaching me, and the thought of my dagger in her garter wasn't much help.

"The saints help her, since I can't," I thought, unhappily.

CHAPTER V

THE HORNS OF WAR

IT SEEMED to me that wherever I went, there in Ferns, green eyes were glaring at me. Whether I was exercising my new horses, Cormac and Boru, so that they would continue to understand the use of the saddle, or whether I was feasting with King Dermot and his noisy chieftains in his wicker-work hall (he had a stone one once, but King Rory knocked it down) or strolling with Aoife or any other of Dermot's daughters, or practising javelin-casting with Donall Cavanaugh—there would be green eyes glaring at me from behind a tree, or a hall-pillar, or something. They didn't always belong to the Mac Breagh—I gather that the old chief of Ballinmish, father of the abbot and the present leader, had been a lusty old lad with a roving eye—but they all had the same expression. They made me nervous. You can't notice that sort of thing, when you're the guest of an Irish king—your guesthood is supposed to protect you. And I usually wore my mail-shirt under my gown. But an Irish axe is nothing to fool with. I was glad when Milo arrived, for I finally got so I was seeing the same look in the eyes of every Irishman there—although they had been pledging me the moment before. I don't think that was my nervousness, either.

Milo reported that St. Erne was enjoying himself riding the rounds of his new territory, and trying to explain to his new subjects that sword land was not subject to Irish law and custom, and getting nowhere fast. You see, sword land—land that has been won by a man at his sword's point—is not subject to the usual laws of inheritance that the Irish have. Crazy laws they are, too, that share the land up among fifty men and more until it's like a beggar's cloak for patches. Dermot was upsetting the customs of centuries when he gave Wexford to Fitz-Stephen and Dun Cathach to St. Erne, as he'd bargained to do—and that's another reason why the Irish hate his memory to this day. Milo wanted to hear my version of the Wexford fight, and he looked sad and blue when I finished. But I consoled him by telling him about the planned attack on Ossory, and he cheered up at once.

So did I. I felt much better as we rode away from Ferns one foggy summer morning. Better to be doing something useful than mooning over the fate of a child with long amber hair and eyes like April violets, for whom I could do nothing, anyhow.

The district of Ossory lies north and east of Ferns, and in those days it was as full of swamps and forests as if it had never known man. Donall Cavanaugh and a few horsemen went scouting, and reported that the chief of Ossory, a lad by the name of Mac Gilla Patrick, who was a personal acquaintance of Dermot's, having gouged out the eyes of the king's young son, left with Mac Gilla Patrick as a hostage—that he was assembling his tribesmen and allies, and deepening the ditches around an old rath, an earthwork fort, that lay on our road to Ossory like a plug in the neck of a wine-jug. On either side of the neck—the road, that is—were bogs and forests.

Milo commented that he didn't like the looks of the road, and I said, "What road?" It was a narrow bare spot running through the woods, and the benighted Irish actually thought it *was* a road! Although if the cowpath from our south pasture to the home farm here looked like that, I'd consider myself disgraced. It had been raining, as usual, and there were puddles in this road that a man could drown in, and soft places where we had to dismount and flounder around or through, towing the horses. The Irish troops didn't mind, being used to it, and lighter armed—but a man in an expensive hauberk who has a good horse has to take precautions. It was a cool morning, but the sweat was standing on me in big drops when we got to fairly solid ground again. We were a muddy and exhausted gang, we Normans, when we came in sight of the mound of the fort, and saw a milling mob of yellow-shirted warriors waving its arms and axes at us from beyond the ditches. There must have been five thousand of them, all told. They'd heard of us, I guess, for they backed off in a hurry when Fitz-Stephen's Welshmen dismounted and unlimbered their arblasts.

I have never cast aspersions on the courage of the Irish. It wouldn't be to our credit, and anyhow it wouldn't be true. And now that they've stopped being so proud and haughty about using decent mail and cavalry-charges, they are mighty tough. But imagine yourself in their places, that day at Ossory! Imagine yourself an Irishman armed sketchily in your own hair and a yellow linen shirt, accustomed to simple hand-to-hand fighting, with your claws in somebody's hair and his teeth meeting in your nose, and then see drawn up before you an array of disciplined, orderly bowmen in good mail brigandines, setting arrows in slot at command, and behind them, large gentlemen in mail, dismounting and drawing their great long swords, ready to cross the ditches you have so painfully dug deeper, heavy shields swinging by the guige-straps from their necks, steel helms rammed well down, and their strange faces, shaven like priests', grinning with pleasant anticipation as they advance—well, wouldn't you feel a strong longing for home? I would, and you're a liar if you say you wouldn't.

At Fitz-Stephen's orders, Donall's men had

cut considerable wood along the way, and brought it along. They dumped it into the first ditch, at a place Fitz-Stephen had picked, while the archers cut loose with flight after flight. Hundreds, it seemed, of yellow-shirted forms lay quiet on the green knoll before us as we hustled across the filled ditch, and behind us Donall's men were screeching like demons, and I could hear Dermot's hoarse bellow, "Mac Murrough aboo! Mac Murrough aboo!" and other comments in Erse, that I didn't get.

We of the dismounted cavalry trotted across the intervening space between the ditches, waving our swords. Here and there a knot of warriors made a stand against us, and they had axes. Somebody ahead of me got careless with his shield, and one of those axe-blades came down whack on his shoulder, and in spite of the mail, it broke the bone and did considerable damage. So I kept my shield with the red boar's head well up and ready, and I charged in on the axeman before my feet could get cold, swinging up my sword, and the next moment his head was in two gory halves, and Donall's Irish were sore about it afterwards, because it spoiled the article for a trophy.

THERE were two other ditches, not so deep as the first, and on the top of the hill a timber stockade. We repeated the business of filling in the ditches, while the archers protected us, and then racing across, ready for business. I discovered that the gay mantles of the chiefs were the things to go after, because when a chief was killed, his followers lost their taste for the fighting and went away from there. The noise was terrific—both sides yelling their war-cries, and axes whanging on shields, and the short dull sound of steel hitting sinew and bone, and the shrieks and groans of the wounded and dying. I did some yelling myself—I get excited in battle—and Eadmer, whom I'd taken good care to lose, came galloping up, having identified me, to carry on his protection job. I swore at him with all the power and vocabulary I had, and Milo laughed his head off, but Eadmer shot me the usual tolerant glance from under his steel cap, and kept loping right alongside.

"I don't suppose your head's just right yet, from getting stood on at Wexford, my lord," he observed, "and you might fall down or something. But go ahead—I ain't spoiling your fun."

I thanked him kindly, and when we converged around the stockade, I managed to lose him again, because one mailed Norman back looks like another in the middle of a howling milling mob. Fitz-Stephen's earnest bawlings sorted us out, and some of us went to work on the gate of the stockade with some of the Irish axes we'd gathered up on the way forward, not caring to take the edge off our own axes with this sort of carpenter work. The gate caved in with a crash, very suddenly, and we fell in on top of it, and there was a devil of a melee for a while. If a man got careless, he got an Irish axe or javelin in the face, and a quick trip to Purgatory. The press was too great for good strokes, and a dozen of us were killed or wounded inside the stockade. A large black-bearded party managed to whang me over the helmet with his axe, hard enough to make me see a thousand stars and suns, although the blade glanced off, as it would, because I was wearing my old-fashioned cone-shaped helmet that was polished smooth as a lady's palm, with no place for a direct blow. But my carelessness made me angry, and I kicked him in the stomach and knocked him down in a very improper way, and finished him off with his own axe, just as I heard somebody screech in my ringing ears, "There they go! After 'em!"

The desperate Irish had chopped an opening in the opposite wall of the stockade, and were getting out fast. We followed; and after us came Donall's yelling levies. So we took the rath, and scattered Ossory all over the landscape.

However, in Irish fighting, it's not the victory in battle that decides who has won, but whether the victor can get home in one piece afterwards. The Ossory forces had scampered off during the fighting in large numbers, but Donall Cavanaugh informed us that we'd see more of them on the way back to Ferns. We couldn't leave men to hold the rath—there were too damned few of us to spare, and the stockade was in no shape to be defended. I thought of that alleged road, and found the porridge that we hastily cooked hard to swallow. We buried the dead decently—our own dead, that is—bound up wounds and fractures, and started back.

We put Dermot and Morice Regan, his other interpreter (O'Gallin had been sent off to Dublin, to his disgust) in the middle of a squad of our cavalry, for we didn't dare risk his lordship's person. As King of Leinster he was our claim to the property we'd fought so hard for, and if some disaffected tribesman took it into his head to slice Dermot's throat, it would be all to do over again. He didn't seem to understand this—he seemed pleased to be riding with us, and he shouted a good deal in Erse, and waved his bloody axe, and sang now and then. Milo and I were with de Prendergast, in the rear, and the van was led by Donall Cavanaugh and over two-score of his father's picked gallowglasses, and several hundreds of assorted kernes romped alongside, whooping and screeching. However, we knew we couldn't count on them, for anything except mopping-up purposes, for they could, and

would, run like rabbits, and, as I've said, I can't blame them.

Well, right about this time, it began to rain, of course.

Since Milo and I were in the rear, all we could see were the horses' rumps and the mailed backs ahead of us, and the green mass of the forest converging overhead and beyond, and Milo was growling that this was too much like blind man's buff to suit him, when, ahead of us, the so-called road dipped suddenly into a wide boggy spot that I recalled only too well, and our march halted while men dismounted and got ready to go around.

At that moment, the Ossory men attacked us.

Cavanaugh and his gallowglasses, in the van, were pleased enough. With howls of joy, they lifted their axes and waded into the bog to meet the other gang. Cavanaugh was a smart lad. He had sorted his men into a hollow square formation, so that whenever the Ossory men swarmed out of the muck to attack, they came up against a fellow in mail, with an axe and a bad disposition. Javelins and insults sailed back and forth, and then the Ossory crowd got dubious and melted away into the thick green shadows of the wet wood.

From the van came the short blast of Fitz-Stephen's horn. I saw de Prendergast grin, and work his own horn into the exuberant thicket of his whiskers. At the first toot, we knew what was going to happen. Ahead of us lay that damned bog, where mailed men and horses could get stuck like flies in spilled honey, and light-weight, half-naked rapscallions would have them at their mercy. So now the whole long column of us faced about, and began an orderly retreat, straight back the way we came.

Now de Prendergast had a hulking big man-at-arms—half Norman, half English—by the name of Robert Smith, who rode at his right hand. As the column started off (and we were now the van) de Prendergast turned to this lad, and said, "Dismount, take fifty men, and stay here until the Irish get by. Get into the muck and underbrush—there's no snakes in Ireland, Dermot says—and stay out of sight."

A PLEASED expression flitted across Smith's large red countenance; he told off the men, and they dismounted, giving their nags to the remaining few of de Prendergast's men. They rode off, and de Prendergast drew rein at the edge of the path. Milo looked at me, and I looked at him; we nodded, and slipped out of our saddles, thrusting the reins at whoever was handy. We edged into the bog by the roadside, as the retreating cavalry passed by, and came to rest in a clump of rowan bushes, all in white blossom, and considerable thorny, too. We found that we had landed near one of de Prendergast's men, a yellow-whiskered article who muttered what he thought of us in English, and opened his eyes wide when I handed him back a couple of juicy ones in the same tongue.

We saw our friends ride by at an easy trot through the rain, and heard the forest-muffled yells of the Ossorians pursuing. I saw Dermot's red head rearing up among the helms of his escort. He had just finished shouting something in Erse, and Regan was interpreting: "He says, 'you'll never be after leavin' those poor boys to drown in the bog?'" with a gesture at us, where we lay on either side of the road, our heads lifting out of the muck like water-lilies or hop-frogs.

Fitz-Stephen laughed, and de Prendergast waved his hand at King Dermot, and shouted, "Tell him not to worry about them—they'll take care of themselves. And you," he faced us grimly, "keep your fool heads down, and smear some muck on your faces!"

Well, what followed was old strategy, I know, but it worked; perhaps because the Irish up to that time hadn't bothered much with strategy, preferring to welt somebody over the head with an axe, and go on to the next. The Normans retreated in good order, Dermot's plaintive bellow dying away in the heavy rain-soaked woodland silence, and then Cavanaugh's Irish brigade went by at a trot, looking baffled, and exclaiming passionately to each other. And the exultant howls of the Ossory crowd grew louder and louder, and we could hear distant splashings in the bog and catch an occasional glint of metal, or flash of yellow shirt-tail.

"My feet are getting wet," growled Milo. That was an understatement, because we had been sliding gently down into the slime for some time. I was worried about my hauberk, and also as to how we could get out of the bog fast enough when the time came. We had smeared our faces with muck—a simple enough trick, but good. It was astonishing how, in the green gloom, even the comb of a helmet looked like a piece of peeled bark when there was no face visible beneath it. I heard the voice of Robert Smith then—he had one of those whispers that's as audible as a shout—and realized that he was the odd-looking log I'd been trying to account for.

"Keep your heads down, you mugs," he addressed us. "After they've gone by, you can come out and scrape yourselves off."

A gentle murmuring that might have been the wind or the ripple of swamp water—if wind or water ever invited a man to go boil his head—answered him. Some sort of insect was flying meditatively in front of my face, trying to figure out where to light. And here came the Ossory men into full view, splashing through the dip in the road, screaming, waving their spears and battle-axes. Chiefs

And right then the hovering insect landed on my nose.

in the lead, their tight trousers slimed and black, their fringed mantles and long whiskers flying in the breeze they made. One of these lads, a tall party with long black hair and beard as kinky as a sheep's wool in the rain, I had observed earlier in the day, and had him pointed out to me as the very Mac Gilla Patrick that had gouged out the eyes of Dermot's young son, and whom Dermot would dearly love to get his paws on. They tore past us, whooping and screeching, hundreds of them—yellow shirts fluttering, spears and axes flashing bright as their wild eyes, light-footed as deer in their coarse brogues, and plenty were barefoot. Hundreds upon hundreds of them, splendid big brawny fellows.

I am trying to tell the truth, and I will, if it kills me. I was scared. I forgot about the advantages of superior discipline, body armor and weapons, and I began thinking, "Lord, there's only a handful of us! If they catch sight of us squatting here, helpless as ants in a puddle of honey, they'll tear us to pieces!" And then I thought, "This is only the Ossory party. What'll happen when all Ireland comes down on us? Why, there won't be enough left of us to bury!"

And right then the hovering insect landed on my nose. Kind of a fly, it was, with hairy legs. My eyes watered, and I twisted my face this way and that, trying to dislodge him, and praying all the saints I wouldn't sneeze. Milo saw what was going on, and after one good look, he turned away his head cautiously and buried his face in the mud. Otherwise, he said afterwards, he would have had to laugh, especially when I got my eyes crossed and my mouth warped around under my ear.

A mob of Irish had just run past us; the crowd seemed to be thinning out a trifle, when I blew the fly off my nose at last, and just in time to notice three men in the red mantles of chiefs coming through the water of the dip. They moved so slowly that they drew my particular attention. Two of them were vigorous young men, but the third, whom they were supporting between them, was elderly and gray-whiskered, and fat, and puffing. But his face was beamingly exultant.

"I told you so! I told you so!" he was yelling, in good French. "We've got them on the run—this is an end of their traitor's work!"

It was Robert de Morreise.

The young men assisting, he scrambled up out of the mud and trotted away between them, down the forest road, his gown flapping wetly against his fat legs, the sleeves of his hauberk falling over his hands. I was thunderstruck—what would that sleepy fat cat be doing in an Irish bog among fighting men, where he might fall down and hurt himself? And who was talking about traitors?

We were alone now, and the sigh of the wind in the trees, the gurgle of water, and a wild chirruping of birds became the principal sounds again. On the path, the myriads of footprints were filling in slowly with water.

And then, from very far away, it seemed, came the single blast of a war-horn.

THE log that was Robert Smith rose out of the bog with a smack. "All right, out of there now, lively," he invited us softly. "That was de Prendergast's horn—they've reached firm ground, and they've wheeled to charge. Get out and scrape yourselves off. String bows. If one of you jug-heads has got his bow-cord wet, I'll drown you in the swamp."

Someone told him what he could do with his bloody bow-cord, and we all came crawling out, draggled and black, like flies out of an inkhorn. Smith sounded a little horn of his own, after he blew the muck out of it.

"Now then," he said, "let's go meet the yellow-shirts coming back, see, so they won't feel lonesome retreating."

"Sir Milo and I first, Smith," I said, with dignity, stepping around in front of him with my sword drawn. "The cavalry leads the charge."

"Cavalry without hosses ain't cavalry," he had the impudence to say, "and you gentlemen are pretty bowlegged to charge on foot, ain't you?"

Of course we were bowlegged, but I smirked at Smith. "Don't you bother your pretty head—five groats'll get you ten that *we* won't be the

ones to tangle up our legs and fall down."

"Taken," said Smith, and the others, laughing and swinging their bows, made side bets. Milo was alarmed.

"We haven't any brass, you ass," he snarled, "what did you want to bet him for?"

"Well, don't fall down," I answered peevishly. "Damn this hauberk, it's full of mud. Dun Cathach aboo!"

It worked out very well, as I learned from de Barri later. Our forces had retreated until they were well on solid ground, and then, when the Ossory forces, all triumph and noise at getting the terrible foreigners on the run, came loping up, the horn sounded and the Norman force wheeled about for the charge!

The Irish, after goggling at the bristling lances of the cavalry, now in the van, decided to go away, and went, the Welsh arrows tearing past their ears, and the cavalry gave chase, and when the fugitives came away, they ran smack into our party, and we were making enough noise for ten score, clattering our shields and making the arrows fly. They must have thought we were reinforcements, for they took a panicky dive into the swamps on either side of the road, and that was a mistake, because Cavanaugh's kernes had taken refuge there until they could see how the fight was coming out. What followed was plain and fancy butchery, and the day was ours in very truth.

I was looking for de Morreise, even when busy with others—and at last I saw his bewhiskered fat face, pale green with fright, coming toward me, and I gave chase to him before any of Donall's men could beat me to him. In terror, he dived into the swamp, and I had the devil's own time trying to keep him from drowning, and me with him, because he got me by the neck and tried to strangle me—either out of panic, or on purpose, I don't know. I had lost my sword in the tangle—I hit him a hard clip on the jaw, and he let loose.

"What the hell are you fighting us for?" I demanded angrily. "I'd be ashamed to act so—I've a good notion to stick your head down in the mud before honest men see you!"

His eyes bulging with fear, he managed a mean little grin. Then he whined, "I was forced to! The Mac Breagh demanded my assistance against—"

"You don't say!" I marveled. "Why, he swore undying loyalty to King Dermot hardly a week ago—and he's with this May-day gang of rowdies now?"

He hesitated, and I started to shove him down in the muck. "Yes, yes!" he screeched. "With a small party—to show friendship to Mac Gilla Patrick!"

I hadn't seen him, of course, but I could have missed him. However, the triumphant exultation of de Morreise when the Irish brigade had been headed toward us had not seemed forced. I didn't get the affair at all. De Morreise was a plotter, not a fighting man—what was he doing here?

Now if I had been a practical man, I would have upended him in the mud as I'd threatened. He was lying to me, and he had been fighting us, and he was a traitor. But I had all the young man's scorn of the old and fat, no matter how crafty he might be—so I gave him a shove, and told him to get back to his Irish pals before he was caught. Then an idea occurred to me, and I asked, "How is Lady Ceredwin, your daughter, these days?"

His fat face turned crimson and under his ragged moustache his broken teeth showed in a snarl of rage. "I have no daughter!" he yelled.

I thought he was being difficult, so I said, "Mac Breagh married your daughter, but she's still kin to you—"

He called her a name. I got him by the neck, and I believe I might have wrung something out of him, when I heard a cry of alarm at my back, and the voice was Milo's. I dropped de Morreise to go to the aid of a better man.

Milo was waist deep in a soft place, and white as chalk under his freckles. "Come on—I'll get you out," I assured him. He swore feelingly.

"I wasn't calling upon you for help, you ass," he yelped. "I was trying to save your fool life, and I got stuck. You were right at the edge of that rowan thicket, when I saw an Irish axe come out of it, aimed right for your neck when you were bending over de Morreise."

I flung around, and dashed—or waddled—toward the rowan thicket in question. The branches were broken here and there, and a shred of scarlet fringe was caught on a thorny branch, but the shelter was unoccupied, and although, being fire-angry, I looked for them, I could find no trace of either de Morreise or the Mac Breagh—at least, so far as I felt I dared venture into the bog with my hauberk on. So that was that, and I would have to wait until later.

But I didn't like the way her father had talked about Ceredwin, and I said to myself, "As soon as things clear up a bit, I think I'll go have a look for her. She might be in trouble."

CHAPTER VI

THE DAMSEL AND THE COW

WHEN we reached firm ground, in a place where the forest had thinned out a bit, we assembled to take account of ourselves. The Welsh were tuning up one of their battle-songs, we Normans were looking pleased, and Dermot was kissing everybody within reach. Presently the kernes came straggling

out of the swamp, carrying roundish burdens that dripped. They laid these articles down before Dermot, each one making a speech as he did so, until they began to pile up, and the ground around them was muddy red.

Now that was a spectacle I didn't enjoy, exactly. In France, warfare is more practical and business-like—you arrange ransoms and bow to each other politely. So I got rather sick of the horrid staring eyes and gaping mouths and the blood still spouting from the severed necks. But Dermot was pleased. He capered around, and clasped the bloody hands of some tribute-bearers, and embraced others, and got himself gory. And they still kept coming. I was watching to see if somebody'd caught the Mac Breagh, or de Morreise, but they hadn't. After a while the horror began to pass off. They were so unconcerned, they might have been fetching up apples to the cider-press.

Until one fellow fetched up a head by its crinkly black beard and laid it at Dermot's feet with an extra flourish. Dermot cried out exultantly, flung his arms around the donor, lifting him from his feet, and kissed him half a dozen times. Then he dropped him, and caught up the head by the ears, clotting blood spinning itself into strings to his feet. It was—or had been—Mac Gilla Patrick, who had blinded Dermot's son. I recognized him. Dermot's hoarse screech of triumph sent the birds soaring upward, and a set of cold creeps down my spine. The next moment, Mac Murrough fastened his teeth in the dead face in one mighty bite, and tore off the nose and lips! He spewed them out, gore all over his face, and bellowed something in Erse. I asked Regan afterwards what he'd said, and the old interpreter beamed like the mother of a child who's said something clever.

"The Mac Murrough said, ' 'Tis the sweetest meat I ever tasted!' "

How do you like that?

Well, that finished the Ossory business, and Dermot ordered us to ravage the territory, and we were pleased to obey. We were mostly wild young chaps, who enjoyed prying off a thatch and setting crops afire. I'm a middle-aged man now, and the memory of what I did makes me slightly sick. You see, I know now something of the back-breaking toil that goes into the planting of the crops, the anxious watching of the weather when the green shoots come up, and the pleasure that comes as the grain heads out, and the harvest prospects look good. And if a gang of armed men came whooping down upon it, and set it afire wantonly, and ripped off the thatch over my family's heads, and drove my cattle bellowing all around the county, I'd probably do something rash, even if I were a mere villein, to pay them back.

But I had no such ideas then, and we cut loose over Ossory, burning crops and houses, driving off stock, and helping ourselves to what looked worth the trouble, which wasn't much. The news of the Ossory defeat had spread rapidly, and the Ossory tribesman scooped up his wife and children and fled before us, with the smoke from his burning fields rising up behind him. The booleying season was just starting, and we made a big haul of cattle and sheep, which are as good, or better, than the King's coin as legal tender in Ireland. They were the devil and all to drive, but we finally used long whips, and our horses caught on fast, and seemed to enjoy it, as we did.

I'll have to tell you about booleying. I can't spell it in Erse, but that's what it sounds like. After the crops are planted, it's an Irish custom for the peasants to drive the cattle up into the hills and waste lands for the summer, and camp out with them, leading a free and easy life while the animals fatten and the women make cheeses. Then at the end of summer, they come back and harvest the crop, unless some hostile neighbor has already done it for them. This is called booleying. You can booley on anyone's land, just as his villeins feel free to booley on yours, and no hard feelings, for the Lord knows there's plenty of waste land. But if you want to make a Norman landholder in Ireland froth at the mouth and hammer the table, ask him what he thinks of booleying! You see, by our laws, our villeins raise crops and stock on our own lands, and if anybody ventured into another's territory, there'd be all manner of hell raised. And in booleying, you don't know where your stock is, or in what shape, or if the Mac Carthys have decided to collect them, until summer's over. I've had no trouble, personally, but it makes me nervous.

Well, as I said, the greater part of the stock hadn't been driven off yet, and we gathered it in, and Dermot was almost as pleased as with the pile of heads. He offered to enfeoff us young knights with whatever of the conquered territory we'd fancy, so, since what we'd seen was mainly swamp and forest, some of us decided to haul off and look the place over. Milo, Gryfydd Fitz-Gerald, Robert de Barri and I, with some others, packed up some supplies and headed for the open country and whatever adventure we could find. Just before we left, Milo and I got a message from St. Erne, congratulating us on the Ossory job, and saying that Dun Cathach would throw a feast for us when we came that way—so in high good humor, we set out.

MILO and I were the only ones in the party who weren't Fitz-Geralds. The Fitz-Gerald family is extensive and very pleased with itself in general, and although I am friendly with very many of them individually,

they get a bit tiresome in gangs. If I had had a grandmother like Nesta, I'd keep quiet about it, even if she was a Welsh princess and mistress of Henry the First. But to hear the Geraldines in full cry, you'd think it was a great honor to have an ancestress who had been a king's cast mistress before she married your grandfather, and who fooled around with any number of men besides. Now my own grandmother was Welsh, but she was only a chief's daughter, and my grandfather would have worked on her with a club if she'd so much as rolled an eye at anyone after their marriage. But Nesta bore Fitz-Stephen to one man, and Maurice Fitz-Gerald to her lawful husband, to mention only two, and the Geraldines are proud of it! Well, my grandfather and grandmother were very fond of each other, and I know, in spite of everything the jongleurs say, that marriage is both endurable and enduring, when the parties are fond of each other.

Bless me, I do get off the subject! Well, Milo and I paired off on these exploring trips. We had a fancy to make claims to neighboring estates, where we could help each other in war, and get drunk together in peace. You see, Milo and I had been friends since we had both served as squires at the court of the Earl of Salisbury and he'd bloodied my nose for laughing at him when he spilled gravy over an abbot. We spent pleasant days riding over moorland and forest, starting wild game in every thicket, and meeting the rest in the evenings on top of some rise that we'd carefully fortified with brush, even though we'd hardly seen a soul all day. It must have been the third morning of our explorations, and misting rain, that something happened.

I had left off my hauberk, on account of the rain, and put on a leather gambeson instead, over Eadmer's protests.

"You'll see," he asserted, as I was pulling the gambeson over my head, "this ain't a land where you can leave off your mail to play games with the natives, unless you *want* an axe in your spine?"

"Ballads!" I snorted, lacing up the neck opening. "You know we didn't see anyone all day yesterday but that swineherd that ran from us. Good chain mail costs money!"

"Well, take my brigandine, then," he said resignedly. "It won't be to my credit when you're fetched back in two halves."

"I don't want your damned brigandine." I caressed my steel cap. "It's too tight for me and you know it. Come on, come on, if you're coming, and stop wringing your paws."

Around noon, so far as we could tell from the clouded sky, we rode up a gentle forested slope to a stretch of moorland, with here and there a clump of gray rocks jutting out, like plums in a pudding. It looked wild and desolate enough, but we noticed that cattle had pastured there recently, in some numbers.

"Booley party." Milo pointed to a cow-pat. "Let's see what's become of them. I rather like this place, Brian. It's high ground, and if it ain't so damned juicy green as it is below, it ain't boggy, either."

"That's right—and see that dip over there, with the bushes alongside? I'll bet that's the source of that little creek we forded just now —water's important to a castle."

We explored around in the drizzle, leaving Eadmer and Milo's Welsh groom discussing the botts beside the spring where they had been ordered to get us dinner. Since the territory was wide, and much broken, Milo and I separated to cover it, planning to meet for dinner and discuss our discoveries.

So I was alone, leading my horse, and wandering among great gray boulders and mosses and thick bracken growth, while the rain beat softly on my steel cap, when I heard a voice, a woman's voice singing, very faint and far off, blown to me on the wind.

Well, I was wet-nursed by a Welshwoman who also filled me up with all manner of fairy tales and ghost stories, so my neck prickled, and my scalp crawled under the steel cap. The Good People mean mortals no good, and probably the faint sweet singing hoped to lure me over the rim of some handy cliff. But I felt that way with only part of my mind—the rest was curious and interested, because the voice was sweet, and the singer female. So I started off in that direction, leaving Cormac behind to nibble at the bracken fronds. I scrambled down into a deep ravine, scrambled out again on the other side, and stood stock-still in the misty rain, listening. I was close enough to recognize the tune—and it was *Welsh*. A sleepy old song that the milkmaids croon to the cattle.

I wondered if I were hearing things that weren't so. Then I wondered if some friendly sprite from my own native hills were handing me a suggestion that I'd better look sharp for trouble. And then, more sensibly, I wondered what a Welsh milkmaid was doing on the Ossory moorland. These thoughts took me three steps forward, up to a giant split rock as big as a villein's hut, that would give me some cover if necessary. I heaved myself up on a projecting knob of rock, and peered over the top.

A woman and a cow were coming toward me through the rain, moving slowly up the slope of moorland to the rock. The woman was singing, the cow taking an occasional snatch at the wet bracken. They were alone. I came around the rock, staring—but not until she was very near me did the woman look up, and see me, and stop, the song dying into breath on her parted lips.

I HAVE forgotten many things since that day so long ago on the Ossory moorland, but it rises fresh upon my memory, so that I see her again, wild and shy and brown like a young fawn in the weeping Irish rain, barefoot in the mosses, the raindrops clinging like jewels in the loose waves of amber hair, the wide eyes, blue as the Welsh hills, staring at me unbelieving, the red lips parted, the pulse throbbing in the rounded throat, the small breasts rising and falling to her quick breathing under the coarse brown sacking of her gown. A flood of crimson rolled from breast to brow, and she drew back a step.

I spoke quickly, to reassure her. "I'd be greatly obliged, Lady Ceredwin, if you'd tell me what you're doing out here alone in the wilderness with a cow."

She swallowed twice, and then spread out her rags in a dignified court curtsey. When she looked up, the red was dying from her face.

"Good-day, Sir Brian," she said, and her voice was rather cool. "To keep people from noticing me."

A woman and a cow were coming toward me through the rain, moving slowly up the slope of moorland to the rock.

"Huh?"

She was gazing past my right shoulder. "Nobody notices a woman with a cow at this time of year, I understand. And I can milk her."

I nodded, and took the lead strap from her. The cow rolled an eye at me wildly, but I addressed her with harshness in Welsh, and she came along. I seemed to feel a chill in the air, and I didn't understand it, along with a number of other matters.

"How's your good lord, and your father?" I inquired politely. "I trust they didn't run themselves breathless on the way back from Ossory?"

"I don't know," she said, "I wasn't there."

I caught her by the wrist, and swung her around so that she faced me. "Stop that dodging," I ordered, "and tell me the truth, if you want help from me."

That sent her nose up in the air. "Who asked for your help, messire? I can take care of myself!"

"Certainly, certainly," I retreated. What had got into her? Was this the way for a girl to treat her childhood's hero? But I had to find out what she was doing in these parts—and her little bare feet were scratched and bruised, and she looked tired. "But won't you dine with us? Sir Milo de Clydach and I are prospecting for our new fiefs, and we can give you something more filling than milk."

She hesitated. But she was hungry, and her pride gave. "Thank you, messire. I shall be h-happy to dine with you."

"We are honored," I bowed, "and Eadmer will be glad to see you."

My horse Cormac came trotting up at that point, snorted at the cow, and then followed us docilely. I was rather pleased to note that whatever had befallen her, it had not broken her spirit. Since she was going to be so haughty, I put on my best French court manners, and when we came up to the spring, I spread my mantle on a rock for her to sit on gallantly. It was on the dampish side, but I couldn't help that. I saw Milo halt in his tracks and stare, and then come trotting up, and Eadmer bowed and scraped and smirked, and thrust a cold roast duck at her.

We ate, and Milo finally stopped giggling nervously, as was his irritating custom in the presence of ladies. Ceredwin was concentrated on the duck, and was heeding none of us. Her manners were as dainty as in the hall at Dun Cathach, but she left not a shred of meat on the bones. As she was finishing, I said, "Madame, we will be delighted to escort you wherever you wish to go. Pray do not distress us by wandering farther alone."

Her eyes met mine, levelly. "If you could tell me which way is Wexford?"

I turned to Milo. "Splendid! You know, St. Erne asked us to come to Dun Cathach. We can stop there overnight, and take madame to Wexford in the morning. You are meeting friends there, madame?"

I knew damn well she wasn't. She flushed. "I am going to get passage to Milford Haven, messire. My mother's people live not far away from there and—"

"What are you going to use for passage money?" I asked, my manners slipping as I regarded her rags and bare feet. But she allowed a faint smile to light her thin young face, and said, "I am provided for in that respect, messire, thank you."

"All right," I answered, disgruntled. "Have it your way."

Eadmer was standing beside me, all respectful attention. "My lady," he spoke up now, and with the utmost reverence, "will the Mac Breagh try to make trouble for you?"

"I don't think so," she said.

"Well, my lady, he's your husband, and he has—"

"He is not my husband," she answered. I saw her hands shaking; she gripped them tight together. I figured Eadmer was right in coming out with a plain question, since I'd got nowhere with my tact and courtesy.

"Didn't he marry you, my lady?" Eadmer's eyes bulged indignantly.

"Yes," she said. "But he had a wife already. So it didn't count."

"The dirty dog!" snorted Eadmer. "When did you find it out, my lady?"

"The morning of the wedding. She tried to kill me." Ceredwin's disheveled head had sunk low as with a weight of shame.

"Tried to kill you?" I gasped. "What sort of brawl was this wedding?"

She shut her eyes. "The abbot tried to say she was not Mac Breagh's wife—that she only l-lived with him in s-sin—but the prioress of St. Bride's, she is his aunt, she was there and she had seen the marriage contract, and she was angry, because Ethnea had been a novice at St. Bride's before the Mac Breagh carried her off and married her later—oh! there was a terrible fight, right in the church, and people yelled and threw things."

"And where was your papa, throughout the wedding?"

"My father wasn't feeling well, messire."

"Surfeit of Irish ale, no doubt," I said. "Well?"

"The prioress gave me shelter at St. Bride's. Father wasn't going to pay my dowry over until the marriage was lawful. But then they had to go to Ossory, because Mac Gilla Patrick would make trouble if they didn't, since he's the next baron to the north. So they went, and I ran away, because I was to marry him again when he came back."

"How about number one—this Ethnea?" inquired Milo.

"He cut her throat, before he left," she answered, and her voice was dull. "So I ran away."

"And a good thing, too." Eadmer was matter-of-fact, as if he weren't observing how the poor little thing was trembling. She had put her fright and horror behind her when she ran away from Ballinmish, but they had caught up with her now. "How did you get the cow?"

"There were people driving cattle, many of them. I went along. I stole these clothes out of a hut, but I left my good red mantle behind to pay for them. So then I kept along the edges, and nobody gave me any heed, and I thought I could drive this cow, because she looked gentle, and I was so hungry that I drank her milk, and—"

"She got into a booley party," Milo explained, as if we hadn't all figured that out. "It was very daring of you, madame—I never heard of so brave a lady!"

She blushed and looked pleased; and I said, "She's no bargainer, though. That red mantle was worth two cows anyhow, in addition to the wardrobe. Well, we'd better be getting along, don't you think? Your lord—or whatever he is—might be along after a while, hunting of his lady-love. We'd better head for Dun Cathach."

So we did; and Milo sent his groom to meet the Geraldine crowd and tell them that we had been summoned to Dun Cathach, and keep his mouth shut about the lady. Her presence at the fortress might leak out, and then we would have callers. And to disguise her, we dressed her up in Milo's steel cap and my hauberk, and set her on one of the pack horses. She wanted to take the cow along, but we talked her out of it, I saying that it would look odd for four armed men to be driving only one cow, so we turned the beast loose.

IT SEEMED mighty good to see our squatty keep once again, looming up against sea and sky. Maybe it was my imagination, but I thought the countryside looked different already, neater and handsomer, and the villeins were surely working harder than before. And over the keep flew St. Erne's proud banner—on a field azure, five martlets, argent. When we rode through the gate, we saw changes there. The bailey was orderly, the manure piles even and shapely, and inside the hall, fresh rushes lay on the floor, and St. Erne had got himself a chair of presence—God knows how, but it was a fancy article, all carved and painted Irish fashion—and himself was sitting in it, in his good hauberk and scarlet mantle, and silver cross and beginning to match the mantle in complexion, too. He was flanked on either side by solemn Welsh sergeants. Standing before him were a dozen or so frowsy unwashed Irish villeins, and with them was a prosperous-looking white-whiskered party in a mantle of red and green striped silk, who was yelling hoarsely and waving his arms. In the warm spot between this lad and St. Erne stood a worried little man in a gray gown and a tonsure, who was trying to get in a word so that he could interpret.

When the shouting stopped, he bowed to St. Erne, and said, "The brehon says, my lord, that ye have no right to the best beast at all, when a subject dies on ye. 'Tis not the custom of the land."

St. Erne's eyes glinted. "You tell that brehon that Dun Cathach is sword land now. The old laws don't hold, and I'm going to civilize him and this pack of savages if it kills 'em. Our laws state that when a tenant dies, the lord takes his best beast as an inheritance tax, see—to repay the lord for the loss of the tenant's services. I'm not going to be hard on anybody, but I want it understood that taxes must be paid. And what's more, I'm not going to board around in their stick-and-dirt mansions to use up food tribute. They've got to bring the rents here to my castle, and everything will be duly recorded." He touched his silver cross.

The clerk translated, and more argument ensued. The sergeants unfolded their arms and looked restless. At last the thunders died into rumblings, and the assembly tramped out, muttering in its beards. We came forward then, while St. Erne was putting his face earnestly into a mug of ale, and when he looked up and saw us, he jumped to his feet and all but fell on our necks.

"Bedamn if I was ever so glad to see honest Christian faces!" he yelled. "Damn the insolence of that brehon—"

"What's a brehon?" asked Milo.

"Kind of a native judge, I guess—knows everything and the price of it! I'm having the devil's own delight collecting my dues and rents, and this after I've worn myself out chasing robbers and mending roads and building bridges. Why, I'm even building them a mill! I've good notion to toss the lot back at King Dermot!"

Well, of course, Milo and I just grinned at that, knowing well enough that a St. Erne would never loose his grip of a handful of land, no matter what happened. Meantime St. Erne was shouting for ale for us, and the sergeants had taken themselves off contentedly, and so had the small clerk. St. Erne nodded after him.

"Got me an interpreter—name of Cooley. Awful names these fellers have. And your friend?"

Ceredwin had ducked behind us bashfully, and no wonder, since she was drowned in my

hauberk, with the shoulders at her elbows and the sleeves falling over her hands, and her bare feet and rumpled yellow head emerging at its extremities. But now she came forward, and bowed very gracefully, I thought, considering.

"I am Ceredwin de Morreise, messire, and I seek your hospitality once again at the invitation of these gentlemen, until I can make my way to Wexford. At least," she hesitated, "I don't think I can be a Mac Breagh now, because it wasn't legal."

St. Erne's eye bulged. He said "Huh?" in a dazed way, and Milo and I tried to explain, shouting turn and turn about until he clapped his hands over his ears.

"Shut up—you're worse than the Irish!" he groaned. Then he bowed to Ceredwin very grandly. "Madame, you are very welcome. My castle and all in it are at your command."

You would have thought our rock heap of Dun Cathach was Cardiff Castle, from the expansive way he gestured. Bless his heart, he was a proud and happy lord of land in those days, and God be thanked he had so much pleasure out of it!

Well, so the ale came in then, and we all sat down to refresh ourselves and exchange information.

And at last Milo asked our host casually, "Where did you pick up an interpreter, St. Erne?"

St. Erne looked complacent. "The abbot of Killanore sent him to me," he explained. "Kind of him, wasn't it?"

There was a silence. Milo and I looked at each other. "I wonder if he noticed—" I began, and Milo cut in.

"She was behind us, and she didn't look like a lovely lady in your hauberk—"

Ceredwin clutched her wooden mug very tightly, and took a small sip. The bright color had died out of her cheeks.

"What's all this?" inquired St. Erne, looking from one of us to the other.

What, indeed, I wondered. Aymon of Killanore hated the Normans—why make a present of an interpreter, then, to a Norman who had done him a service, and whom, therefore, he must hate more than any other?

"Well," I said, "the abbot is brother to the Mac Breagh, and we were just wondering if Brother Cooley had noticed Ceredwin, and would carry tales."

"Nonsense! Ballads! These Irish monks are very pious—they won't so much as lift their eyes to look at a female bird, let alone stare at a lady."

That was true, of course. But I was worried, just the same. I twisted the seal ring that had been my grandfather's 'round and 'round my left forefinger, and wondered just what was going to come out of all this.

CHAPTER VII

THE HANDSOMEST MAN IN IRELAND

I DECIDED to hunt up Brother Cooley.

I looked all around the bailey for him without results. As I was coming out of the storehouse, I saw Father Denis, our chaplain, you know, with a basket on his arm, looking aimless and carefree, coming through the gate.

"Herbs, eh?" I asked, knowing his pastimes, and he beamed at me, and gave me a long explanation, mostly Latin, and a display of scraggly-looking weeds. I nodded solemnly, and then asked him where I'd find Brother Cooley.

His white brows went up and his mouth went down. His feelings got hurt easily, so I added that I wanted to inquire as to the health of Abbot Aymon.

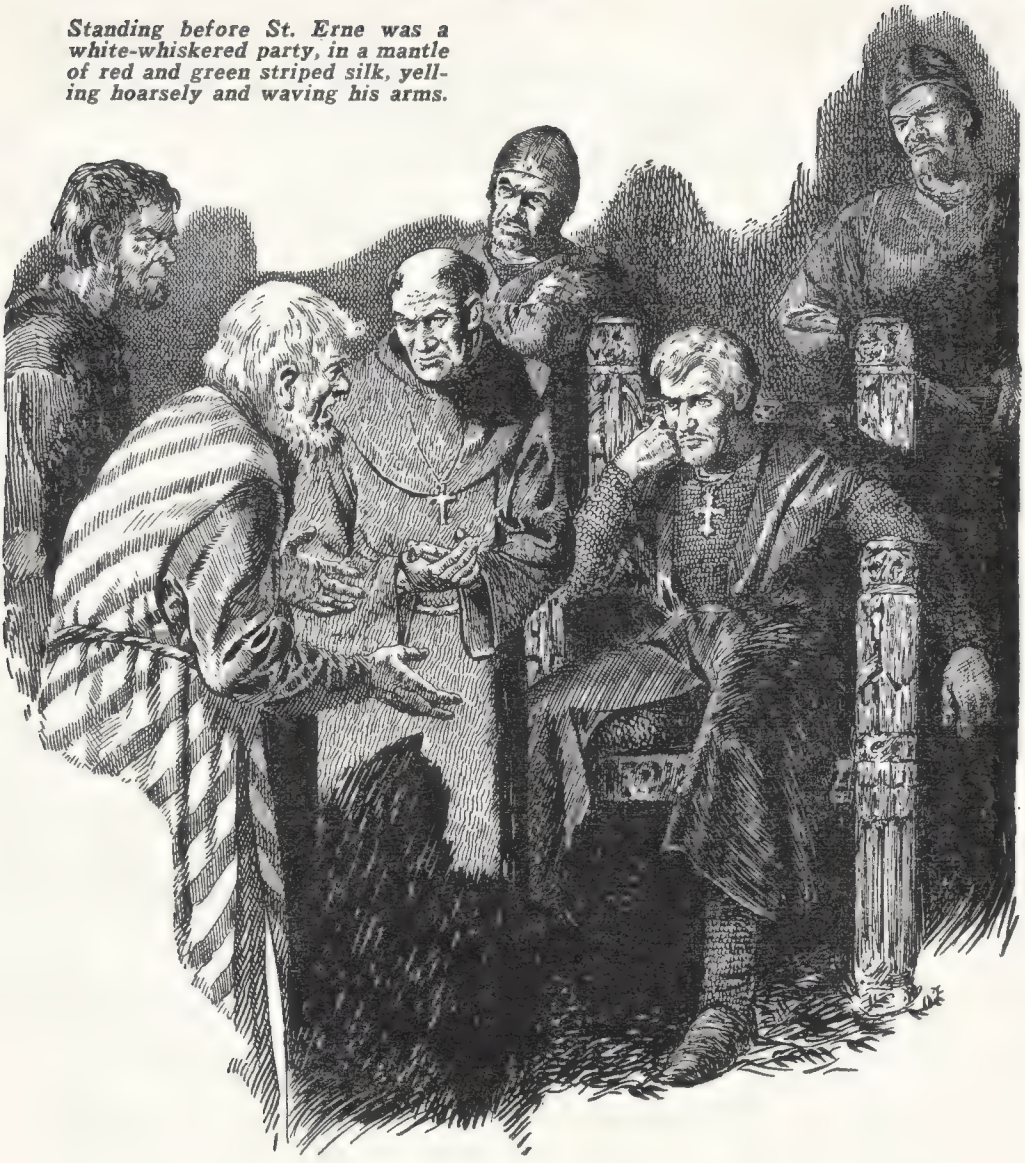
"You'll find him in the haymow, messire. Sir Edmund has set aside a place for him there, and it's all littered with ink and parchments, and I with no space to dry my herbs!"

I consoled him, and went over to the stables, where I found Ebba, the big English man-at-arms, grooming St. Erne's new Irish stallion, and talking baby talk to it, and he blushed red as a bride when I interrupted, and merely jerked his thumb at the ladder to the mow at my question. So I climbed up.

There was a new sort of stall arrangement there, set apart from the haymow by some logs hastily lashed together. Under the vent-hole, a sort of desk took the place of a manger, and on it were several curling sheets of parchment and some ink-horns. Brother Cooley, however was not in sight, and I gathered that he was answering a call of nature. So I took a look at the parchments. Several were land grants, in Latin, to some of the men-at-arms; to "our trusty vassal, Dyfydd ap Huw, the manor of Taghatie, for service to me at my castle of Dun Cathach, to have and to hold," etc. And another parchment was lying on the floor, where it had rolled into a dusty corner. I picked it up.

It was covered with Irish script. Now I couldn't read Erse, but I did see, and recognize, my own name, at which my eyes bulged—*BRIAN MAC BRIAN*. A few words beyond it was something that looked like an attempt to spell Ceredwin as, roughly, it's pronounced—*CREDUIN*. The ink was wet, and I smooched it with my thumb.

Light footsteps sounded below, and I heard Ebba address somebody, in tones of deepest respect, as a dirty gray Irish rat. I dropped the parchment on the floor, leaned against the log partition, and was busy paring my nails when Brother Cooley entered, and halted in his tracks.



Standing before St. Erne was a white-whiskered party, in a mantle of red and green striped silk, yelling hoarsely and waving his arms.

His small eyes glittered in the dim light, and he fastened on me a glare of hatred while he inquired politely what he could do for me. Your Irishman is the worst conspirator in the world; if his design is merely to steal a cheese out of your dairy, it stands out plain upon his mug.

"I hear you are from Killanore," I said, bowing politely in turn. "I hope you'll convey my respects to your abbot. Is he well?"

"He is that, blessed be the saints," answered Brother Cooley, short and sharp, and ready for me to go.

"St. Erne gives you plenty of work, I'll be bound," I remarked. "He's great on law and documents." I flicked Dyfydd ap Huw's charter lightly, and it rolled off the desk, and I scooped it up, along with the other parchment, and restored them. "Is Erse hard to learn?"

"It is the language of scholars and saints!" he cried fervently. "And no base invader will ever be able to coil his lying tongue around it!"

"If you mean me," I said pleasantly, "why, I can speak Welsh, and I'll bet you a fine psalter to a sixpence that I could learn to speak Erse too."

I grinned at him and ran down the ladder, out across the bailey to the great gate, where St. Erne was hoisting himself into the saddle while the Irish stallion danced uneasily, Ebba at its head.

"I've got to talk to you," I said, and pulled him down, and walked him over to the well. "Look, St. Erne. We'll have to escort the lady to Wexford tomorrow. That interpreter you've got is writing to her brother-in-law the abbot, and from what I've seen, he's tipping the abbot off as to her whereabouts. It looks like trouble for us base invaders. If I could only read Erse, I could probably find some other interesting matters."

"But you were able to tell that Brother Cooley's a spy, eh, from what you saw?" He eyed me dubiously.

"Well, if he's not spying, why should he mention Ceredwin to a person who's interested in finding her? I don't like his looks, myself, and if I were you, I'd ship him back to Killanore and ask King Dermot to send you an interpreter. After all, it's to Dermot's interest that we stay here."

"And how about the lady? Does she want to be shipped off to Wexford?" He winked at me, and I feared he wasn't taking me seriously.

But that night Brother Cooley disappeared, and then St. Erne felt rather different.

CEREDWIN graced the high table that night, and I mean she graced it in very truth; she had washed her face and combed her hair, and was dressed in Milo's saffron linen gown, which I must admit was closer to her size than mine. A garrison of soldiers soon becomes a garrison of pigs in a pen, you know—bristly and dirty, eating anything that doesn't bite them first, and sleeping peacefully in litter. But let one small damsel sit beside the lord at the high table, dainty about herself and her feeding, laughing and speaking softly, not ogling anyone, nor yet acting haughty, but being gentle and friendly to all—well, it's wonderful how even the scrubbiest groom will wash his face before meals, and how the mess sergeant will strive his utmost to produce a handsome joint, and how the knights will try to keep their jaws scraped and the grease spots off their gowns. If we'd had a tapestry, we'd have hung it up—yes, on the this-way-and-that-way walls of Dun Cathach! Eadmer hung up the blankets for her bower again, with insufferable self-importance, and I didn't sleep too well that night—I was having so many pleasant ideas crowd into my head. I went to sleep at last, thinking that Milford Haven was back in Wales, after all, and her relatives might marry her off to some unappreciative lug before I could get back from Ireland, or her father might interfere, and had I saved her life or hadn't I, and who had a better right to her society, and I had better get busy.

I was planning to take her to Wexford myself, if I could get her away from Milo, who was beginning to get calf-eyed when he looked at her, and sound her out on a number of matters. But in the first gray of dawn, Art O'Gallin was yelling for admittance outside the gate, and he brought rather unpleasant news.

For one thing, de Prendergast had gotten sore at King Dermot and hauled himself off, and they said that he was going to join MacDonell of Ossory, who was biding his time to take a whack at Dermot. We could hardly believe that, even of a short-tempered lad like de Prendergast, but O'Gallin said he had it on good authority. And likewise, unpleasant rumors had begun to reach Ferns that the High King of Ireland, Rory O'Connor, was gathering a huge force to crush Dermot and his foreign allies. St. Erne ruefully laid aside the parchment on which he had been making a careful drawing of a prospective water-mill.

"Guess it'll have to wait," he sighed.

"True for ye," nodded O'Gallin. "Dermot's liegemen are meltin' away like the snow in the sun—Leinster would be a trembling sod if it weren't for Fitz-Stephen and your honor."

Well, that was complimentary, but not reassuring. While they were talking, Ceredwin entered from the bailey, and seeing O'Gallin, she came up to greet him. His eyebrows crawled clear up to his hair, and he gasped, "The wife of Mac Breagh!"

"We're not so sure." St. Erne would have preferred not to reveal her presence, but since there was no help for it, he told the story, with Milo and me adding a word here and there. Ceredwin said nothing, but sat blushing richly at being such a center of attention. When we spoke of escorting her to Wexford, he shook his head slowly.

"The storm may break afore ye bring her there safe," he said. "If ye'll take advice of mine, messires, madame, it would be safer if she were to bide at Kileeda, at the convent of the Holy Veil. 'Tis not far from Wexford, and the prioress is a cousin of King Dermot's, who will keep her safe."

The idea pleased me considerably, so I lent voice to it, and Ceredwin seemed satisfied. She did not know her kinsfolk in Milford Haven very well, and convent life was something she was accustomed to, and liked. She bowed to us, and thanked us all. "Such kindness," she said, her blue eyes shining.

"It was kindness of yourself, madame, to let the light of your eyes shine upon us in this dark hall," said St. Erne, spreading himself, "even for a little while."

"Not dark at all," she corrected him gently, and suddenly threw her arms wide. "All light—friends."

Ceredwin faced me squarely and her eyes flashed blue flame.

Well, Milo and I threw dice together to see which one took her to Kileeda, and which one rode with St. Erne and O'Gallin and a good force of men to Ferns to reassure King Dermot and see what was doing. I won. So that same morning Eadmer and I rode away with her, and the sun decided to come out just about then and shine down upon her yellow head, and west of us, the hills shouldered up the sky, and the woods and pastures were fresh green.

Every time I looked at her she seemed more interesting to me. She met my eyes without simpering or artifice—she was still coltish and shy, I thought, admiring how transparently pure her slightly tanned complexion was, and how the blood rose into her cheeks like a banner, and how the pulse throbbed at the base of her soft throat. I kept passing her little compliments, and she kept not responding in the way she should. It bothered me, for I recalled she hadn't seemed very responsive there on the moorlands, either, and I wondered what had gone wrong with my approach.

"A delightful day for a delightful journey," I said finally, aware of Eadmer's dark frown, and ignoring it. She sat very straight in the saddle and answered.

"I'm sorry I've caused you trouble, messire. You and Sir Milo were selecting your fiefs and you had to stop because of me. And Sir Edmund was as kind in his welcome as if I weren't a real danger to you all."

"Sure, a pretty girl is a real danger to a crowd of single men—temporarily single anyhow—likely to have our claws in each other."

She looked at me coolly. "I mean, messire, my husband is likely to make trouble, if he learns that I took refuge at Dun Cathach."

"Don't call him your husband," I said irritably. "You know that marriage of yours wasn't legal. Well, you'll be safe at Kileeda, and when things have settled a bit, I'll come and—"

"Please don't trouble yourself any more about me, messire." No question of it, her tone was cool. "I have lived most of my life in a convent, and I shall be contented to continue to do so."

"You mean, take the veil?" My jaw sagged.

"Yes, messire." She meant it. She wasn't trying to stir my interest.

"Look, promise me not to take the vows until things settle down and I can see you again. You haven't seen much of the world, you know. You ought to consider that. It's one thing to be happy in your vow of poverty if you've never worn jewels and embroidered gowns—or in the vow of obedience if you've never had a chance to lead a man and his estate around by the nose—or in the vow of chastity if—"

I HAD been edging my horse nearer, and at this point, I reached for her, and drew her from her saddle to mine like a silken scarf. The horses halted willingly enough; Eadmer cleared his throat. Ceredwin looked up at me, surprised and puzzled—she didn't tilt her head back and shut her eyes as she should have. I don't know what I was thinking about just then—whether I was feeling sorry for the poor girl who was so young and who would have no taste of life, or whether I recalled that earlier embrace at Dun Cathach and wanted to finish it, or whether—I don't know. I started to kiss her, gently, but I rather got out of control.

I grew aware that I was getting some good shoves in the chest, and that she was kicking and squirming vigorously, although my mouth was hard pressed on hers, and my hand had cupped itself securely around her little breast. She jerked her head away suddenly.

"Look out, you'll fall!" I was irritated. "Does my breath offend you, or something?"

With a sudden convulsive wriggle, the strength of which amazed me, she freed herself and dropped lightly to the ground. She didn't run, though; she faced me squarely, and her eyes flashed blue flame.

"Your breath doesn't offend me, but you do," she said. "You know you don't care a rap for me, but you make love to me, and think I should like it! O, I've heard tales about you, messire, but I didn't believe them. Well, messire, I'd prefer the vow of chastity to a kiss like that, which doesn't mean anything, and only hurts my mouth!"

Her soft red lips set themselves firmly. Then she turned her back on me, and before I could dismount, or do anything but stare at her with my mouth open like a jackass in front of a bundle of hay, she took the reins of her horse and rose into the saddle, lightly and quickly as a spray of foam rising above the Teeth of Leir.

Then she turned to me and said, very politely, with the color high in her cheeks, "I don't want to offend you, messire, for you have been kind to me—you saved my life, and I have not been able to repay you. I would like to be your friend, messire—your *friend*."

"Well," I recovered my tongue and spoke bitterly, "no doubt you'll be happy to pray for my wicked soul when you get to Kileeda."

"Yes, messire, but you're not wicked at all. You're a very brave and noble knight—only rough, and impolite."

"The hell you say," I muttered, gathering up the reins in a fury. Somewhere behind me, Eadmer gave a mighty cough. Rough and impolite! me, Brian Fitz-Brian, 'welcome in perilous lists or lady's perfumed bower' as a jongleur remarked about me once, which was a silly thing to say, but I did have a reputation as a smooth fellow in those days, and needed kicking badly.

So I rode beside her in angry silence, with Eadmer on her other side, looking smug and I-told-you-so, until we drew near to Kileeda; and then I fell to reflecting that I might get killed, and she wouldn't regret her behavior to me unless I behaved more prettily. So I began comparing my experience in the French war with those in this Irish expedition, thinking that she could take no offense, and she didn't—she listened, all eager interest, and asked questions that showed she understood something of what I was talking about.

I commented on this, and she said, "Well, Sir Brian, you know our convent was close to the tourney-field, and often they brought wounded knights there to be nursed, and I did like to listen to what they said—it sounded more interesting than cheese-making and embroidery, although Sister Agatha wouldn't let me if she knew it, but I used to wash bandages under the window, and I would hear things. Not that I understood all of them."

"Probably not," I answered, "and just as well."

"I'm not ignorant, messire," she hastened to say, flushing slightly. "You mustn't think me a stupid child. Only there were technical matters, battle-commands and armor and harness words that I'd never heard. I must thank you for your present."

"Present?"

"The beautiful knife you gave me, Sir Brian. I really think it saved my life when poor Ethnea came after me—"

"*Poor* Ethnea, who tried to murder you?" I inquired.

"She's dead, messire. And oh, she loved him so much—it was a cruel wicked thing he did, to kill her!"

"There, there—she probably didn't suffer much," I consoled her, being extremely doubtful myself, but seizing this chance to edge my horse nearer and take her hand. She didn't seem to mind, and I caught Eadmer nodding solemn approval, just as the belfry of the priory came in sight.

The convent had been endowed by King Dermot, and built around a small church of the ancient Irish fashion, made of rough stone, with the doors and windows wider at the threshold than at the lintel. We were shown into the parlour, and the prioress came there and looked us over with dark suspicion. She was a small forceful-looking lady of middle age, with light blue eyes like her royal cousin's. She couldn't speak French, of course, so I addressed her politely as Reverendissima, and stated our problem in as good Latin as I could manage, and she looked as astonished to hear me as I would if my old stag-hound should venture a remark about the weather. But she agreed to give shelter to Ceredwin, and even asked us to sit down and take some refreshment. Ceredwin expressed her gratitude in the same tongue, but I said that we must join our comrades who were riding to the aid of her cousin, and under the stern eye of the prioress, bowed over Ceredwin's hand, and said quickly in French, "Don't take any vows, Ceredwin, because I'm coming after you when things get peaceful."

"I am not free to take any vow now, messire."

"Say you like me a little, in spite of my bad manners!"

"No, messire."

"What!" I said it pretty loud, the prioress cleared her throat, and my ears started to flame.

"I mean, n-not a little, m-messire," she answered, and withdrew her hand, and I saw the blue dancing of her eyes, before Eadmer yanked at my hauberk and we backed out of there.

"You got to behave in a convent, my lord, even if you are the handsomest man in Ireland," he muttered. As we hustled out, I trying to think of a word to crush him with, the portress grinned at me, and she hadn't a tooth in her head.

WE found considerable confusion at Ferns. It was true that Dermot's recently recovered allies had deserted him, and on all sides we heard tales of the coming of King Rory and his mighty force. Fitz-Stephen was alarmed, I now know, although he didn't show it. He put us to work fortifying a height above Ferns with ditches and logs, very complex, and we worked like slaves and sweated rivers. We didn't know it, but the High King was scared too. He camped out with his swarming forces of kernes and gallowglasses, just out of bowshot, and sent messages to Fitz-Stephen, offering him a good sum in cattle and gold if he'd go home. At the same time he sent other messengers to Dermot, inviting him to assist in the cutting of the foreigners' throats in order to regain full possession of his ancient kingdom of Leinster. Neither offer was accepted. Fitz-Stephen simply refused, while Dermot, who was more of a politician, agreed to acknowledge Rory as his overlord and gave hostages for good behavior. He also agreed, O'Gallin told me, to ship us all home as soon as things quieted down—agreed with his fingers crossed. It's as I said—the Dermot and Fitz-Stephen *had* to trust each other, or both would go down.

So the High King, disturbed by quarrels among his own forces, pulled out for home, and we could relax a bit.

Shortly after this, here came Maurice Fitz-Gerald, Fitz-Stephen's half-brother, casting anchor in Wexford harbor with a good force of archers and mounted men-at-arms, all spoiling for a fight, and Dermot gladly accommodated them. He took them north to bother Dublin, a city that had been thumbing its nose at him too freely. Its lord, Hasculf MacTorquil, a half-Irish Dane, was slow on the uptake, but when Fitz-Gerald's gang came plundering up to Dublin, he submitted to Dermot as his most loyal subject—for a while.

We were making the most of the peaceful end of the summer. Fitz-Stephen was building himself a castle on a crag above Wexford. St. Erne was working on his mill and his reforms, and Milo and I had plans of our own.

We had located two pieces of adjoining territory, well-wooded and watered, and touching St. Erne's land on the south. St. Erne lent us ten men to help, and we set off, feeling good. There were two gentle hills, one in Milo's territory, one in mine, that we had selected for our castle sites, where we could signal by beacons in case of trouble. I had grown pretty handy with axe and shovel now, and we all stripped to our drawers except the watchman, and went at it—dug a deep ditch, piled up the earth for a barricade, and cut down trees for a stockade. The local natives came and gawped at us, and we had an early brush with a local chief, name of MacCloghan, a tough little man

My heart was mixed up with my teeth for a moment and I thought, "There goes my head."

with a big head. He had to have the idea of sword land explained to him. During the argument, he got a Welsh arrow in the broadside of the breeches, and we might have had trouble, but we threw him, extracted the arrow and smeared the wound with balm, and he went off muttering and holding his backside. We had tried to explain to him that if he paid his taxes and caused no trouble, we'd not disturb him; but he didn't seem to get it. After Milo's stockade was up (he'd won the draw) MacCloghan came back, with a few followers, a pig and a jack of ale, and we feasted him and sent him home drunk and happy.

We were pretty busy, and proud and contented, too, those early September days. We sweated all day at each other's fortifications, and then stood off and admired the result as if it had been a handsome stone motte-and-bailey instead of a ring of wood and dirt that sifted out the largest cows. We were short of men, abominably so. We had some Irish villeins—betaghs, they call them—helping dig ditches, but we had to be careful. One of them

jumped me as I was inspecting a heap of rocks at the foot of Milo's hill, to see if we could use any of them, and I was clad solely in my drawers and my clean conscience. The lad had an axe. I had just been bitten by a gnat or something, and had just stooped to smear and scratch it, when I saw the shadow. My heart was mixed up with my teeth for a moment, and I thought, "There goes my head," but I picked up a rock and flung it, and got him right in the wind . . . MacCloghan claimed he was no man of his—and he may not have been. I got a good axe out of it, but after that I didn't need Eadmer's lectures to make me keep on my brigandine and helm. "Better be hot in hauberk and helm than be cool in your drawers and cold and stiff afterwards," was the way he said it, and it wasn't a bad epigram for an Englishman.

Well, after some talk, we decided to send for reinforcements. St. Erne could spare no more men, but I figured my uncle, back at Pen Mynydd, might help. I was his heir, you see—he'd been married three times and had no luck and was looking for number four, but he wasn't a bad old boy, and I thought some recruits could be scared up from the estates. So I sent Eadmer.

He made a great fuss about going, so I had to escort him to Wexford myself, and shoved him aboard a Manxman, who agreed to dock him at Cardiff for half a lady's gold necklace I happened to have. The captain was thrifty, and I knew he'd get Eadmer over and back for the rest of the necklace. An outrageous price, but it would be worth it to see his sour mug again—I could trust uncle for the fares of the recruits, if any. The last sight I had of him, he was draped over the stern of the boat as the tide carried it away, his red horse-face longer than ever, while he shouted warnings at me. "Don't trust 'em, don't turn your back on 'em!" he howled. "And watch out for the MacBreagh feller!"

"Ballads!" I bawled across the widening waters, reflecting that I might have time to stop at Kileeda on the way back; it would be only a little out of my way. "Get back in time for the butchering!"

Well, he came back, you know, in less time than that, but the butchery was all over by then.

CHAPTER VIII

MASSACRE AT DUN CATHACH

MILO and I had picked up a little Erse from our new subjects. Mac Cloghan himself had told us what to say to a betagh snoring under a tree in a manner to fetch him out in a hurry. MacCloghan was not a bad fellow at all, and he is still a friend of mine, and I am sure he had no share in what happened on St. Wilfred's Mass. He is Irish, and never lets you forget it, but he's not treacherous.

That was a foggy, chilly October morning. I had just come off watch, having been relieved by Evan Vawr, one of our Welshmen. All I wanted was a chance to curl up in my mantle in front of the embers, when I heard Evan yell a challenge, and a strange wailing cry respond. I swore, untangled myself from my mantle and hustled to the gate, where Evan, secure behind the mantelet in the wooden watch-tower above the gate, was sliding a quarrel into the slot of his cross-bow. I scrambled up the ladder and stood beside him, trying to see through the milk-thick mists below.

On the far side of the ditch stood a shivering, skinny lad, a sheepskin over his shoulders, gesturing northward.

"Who the hell are you, and what do you want?" I yelled crossly. He gabbled, and I couldn't understand a word except one, and that was "Maelmorra." That was their name for Milo, and my inside went stiff as a dried herring. I told Evan to lower the drawbridge, and I shot back the bolt of the great gate. Our drawbridge was made of two great split oak logs, that could be lowered one at a time, and fixed in the stockade was another log, rigged just above the gate, that would fall when a cord was released, and bean anyone who looked unfriendly. If all was well, the other log could come down, thus making a good entrance for mounted men. If you'll believe me, Evan Vawr had dreamed this device up all by himself, and it worked very well.

The stranger came inside. He was quite young; his beard was a dark fuzz, and his nose dripped with cold. I shook him gently by the shoulders when he started gabbling again, and ordered him to slow down. He did.

"Maelmorra sends me, Brian MacBrian, for that he's attacked by many, to pray you to come with your men."

It was what I'd looked for. Sword land must be held by the sword. I routed out the men and explained matters, keeping Milo's messenger at my side. I didn't like his looks much, and something about him bothered me—he had an impudent pale blue stare that seemed unlike a betagh's glance. So to be sure, I stripped him, and removed a long keen dagger from underneath his shirt.

I took eight men, leaving four. We had borrowed from Fitz-Stephen until Eadmer should return, and he was glad to lend them to us—every castle counts, you know. Those who were left were Welsh, with the exception of Ebba, their leader—a true-born Englishman and the worst cook I ever encountered, but Eadmer's second cousin and a very solid type. Evan Vawr I took with me.

It was four miles or thereabouts as the crow flies, through wet October woods and deep ravines, to Castle Perilous, as Milo fondly called his little pile of sticks and dirt. We set off through the mists, finding that we couldn't go very fast because of the rough ground and the damned slippery leaves that bothered the horses. The messenger, hitched to my stirrup, kept pointing westward and gabbling excitedly. I figured he must be mixed up in his directions—Castle Perilous was due north. So we proceeded in the usual way, although he jerked at the stirrup, wailing, until I was forced to kick him.

I was cold through and through, and not with the chill of the foggy autumn morning, either. And I didn't feel better when Evan urged his horse forward and said, "Have you thought, lord, that it may be a trap? The Pigsty is not well defended, now."

(The Pigsty was what I called my castle, on account of the family crest of the Red Boar's Head, and it usually lived up to its name.)

"I wonder . . . if this lad's lying, I'll hack him into stew-meat."

Milo's ostensible messenger looked up with a snarl that showed misshapen yellow teeth too large for his mouth, and I gave his message no further heed. We rode on, hard as we could. A pretty plain track had been worn between Pigsty and Perilous in the days when we were building, and the horses skidded less as we went uphill. Soon the stockade of Perilous loomed out of the mists, and we were shouting, making noise enough to alarm any attacker.

"Something is wrong," observed Evan. "The bridge is down, but there is no one in the tower—"

An early-rising wind blew the mists, and the gate opened with a dismal squawk to show the emptiness of the bailey. I thrust the messenger into Evan's large hairy paws, and trotted across the drawbridge.

"Milo! Hey, Milo!" I bawled, looking around fearfully for bloodstains and dead bodies; but all was deserted. The lean-to shelters we'd built for the horses were empty, and so was the stick and dirt keep, except for the ashes of a fire, an old mantle kicked into a corner, and some gnawed mutton bones. I ran out and leaped into the saddle. As I rode across the drawbridge, the men's faces turned to me whitely.

"Something's wrong," I said. "No man in his senses would ride away and leave his gate open and his bridge down. Scatter, and see if you can find anything—tracks, or horse-droppings, or—or blood."

They scattered, and I tied up the messenger to my stirrup again. The thought came to me that in my grandfather's time these Welshmen had been as savage as the Irish themselves, and now they were steady disciplined soldiers. Not that they're tame—I wouldn't call 'em that, if I valued the truth or my valuable hide. But they won Ireland for us with their superb Welsh bows, as I am one of the first to acknowledge.

I WAS holding Boru's reins in one hand and the prisoner's shoulder in the other when I felt him squirm, and looked, just in time. I always carry a small very sharp awl in my right saddleskirt for harness repairs along the road, and bedamn if he hadn't got it nearly out of the slot!

I sloshed him two juicy ones over the ears, and he dropped like a stone on the soaked mosses, and Boru snorted and stamped. I stood over master messenger until his senses came back, and he shoved himself up slowly, and felt his head to see if it was still on. Then he glared up at me with hate-filled eyes and started to talk.

"Save your breath," I advised. "I don't know that much Erse." Then I tried what Erse I had. "You must not touch my weapons nor hurt my horse. Your story of Sir Milo's need was a lie."

He understood, all right. He grinned toothily, and shook his head.

"It was no lie. The proud invader is dead like a hog in the swamp!"

The triumph and hate in his eyes woke memories. "You're one of the MacBreagh tribe," I observed. "And that was another of them that attacked me at the foot of Perilous the other day. . . ."

He lifted his head proudly, and although his eyes were not green, his look was his confirmation of my theory, even before he said, "I am younger brother to the MacBreagh. I am Lugaid. Death to all foreigners!"

"No doubt, no doubt—but keep your paws off my accouterments before I chop them off at the wrists; and let's have the truth about Sir Milo now."

"You'll get no word out of me, dark foreigner," he sneered. He hated me now; I had boxed his ears and laughed at him, and had not bothered to draw my sword. At that moment Evan and some others came riding back, shouting that they'd seen the prints of horses' hoofs heading westward, and had noticed a peculiar style of horseshoe affected by Gryfydd ap Dewi, a rather heavy-set lad in Milo's menie.

"So it is our friends," Evan ended, with a sigh of relief.

"At least, they left alive, I guess. What'll I do with this?" I jerked a thumb at Lugaid. "Something bad is afoot, Evan. This fellow is a MacBreagh, his message was a lie, and he's doubtless working for his big brother."

"I shall tie him up, inside the bailey," sug-

gested Evan. "Meredydd shall watch him. When we come back, we ask questions."

So the last I saw of Lugaid, he was lying in the bailey mud, trussed up like a hen for market with harness straps, employed by Evan on refractory horses, so that the more they pitched and kicked and fought, the tighter the straps got.

I was badly worried. As we galloped recklessly down the slippery hill-slope after the others, I wondered if Milo *had* been lured into a bog or into some other tight place where his little force could be easily wiped out, and I cursed his folly in dashing off without leaving a small guard at his castle. Up hill and down dale we rode, and into a deep glen, full of rocks where we could not find any trace of hoofprints.

We bawled and shouted, and the echoes answered us, and finally as they died, we heard a faint shouting, somewhere away to the south and west.

We got out of that glen on the double, and beyond it, saw the green surface of a bog, and low hills beyond, and coming toward us a mounted man, who waved his arms first at us, and then westward. At least Milo had a guard posted.

We rode alongside the brink of the bog, hard as we could, and Evan, who has eyes like a hawk, recognized the man as Gryfydd ap Dewi. But before we came up to him, a horrid shape, all green slime and muck, ran past him, waving its arms. It looked like an unburied corpse, but it was Milo, and I leaped out of the saddle. We embraced, pounding each other's backs.

"What the hell do you mean," he demanded, "sending after me to say you were attacked at the bog-side, and wanted help? I've a good mind to throw you in it!"

"Try it, sweetheart, try it—*I* sent you no message, and something damn funny is up!" And I told him about the pranks of the younger MacBreagh. We puzzled about it, while Milo dried himself off and his men assembled from the various sections of the shore they'd been searching.

"That was the same chap that told me you were in trouble," Milo said. "Looks like they wanted us out of the way, that they set us both searching for each other."

"Yes," I said, "and what I want to know is why?"

We looked at each other.

"Let's get back to Perilous," I said. "I left a man there—I don't go chasing off without posting a guard!"

"You don't need to guard Pigsty—even an Irishman wouldn't want it," he sneered, working himself into his hauberk.

We were off, then, fast as we could go. We were just crossing a short stretch of wild moorland when Something spoke to me. Don't ask me what. Maybe my patron saint. Maybe—maybe a soul wrenched violently from its body, and passing by on the October wind. Maybe I just had an idea, and only thought I heard a voice say *"Dun Cathach—"*

I reined in so suddenly that Evan cannoned into me, and there was language.

"Who said 'Dun Cathach'?" I demanded. That halted the party, and men looked at each other while the horses snorted and danced.

"Nobody did, you ass," Milo informed me. "Don't go mystic on us—you've no more Welsh blood in you than I, and—"

"D-dun Cathach," I gulped. "Milo, I wonder—I wonder if I can't guess why MacBreagh's little brother pulled this trick on us, so that we would get lost, and out of reach of any messenger?"

Milo paled under the mud. "Why didn't they attack us?"

"Because they're attacking elsewhere, and don't want to be bothered by possible reinforcements—they could settle us later. Milo! If that Cooley lad got to Killanore, MacBreagh will be thinking that Ceredwin's at Dun Cathach!"

"As if he'd need an excuse," sniffed Milo. He rose in his stirrups. "Let's go! Maybe there's something in what you say, and if there ain't, we'll scrounge a dinner off St. Erne and laugh at you."

"I hope to God you can," I muttered. Then I swung around in the saddle and explained to the men what I felt, feeling rather foolish. But I need not have feared resistance from them. They were Welsh, and every last one of them had a bard roosting in his family tree, or a grandmother with second sight, or had himself seen something white near a haunted pool. They were as certain that I'd had a warning as they were that it was past time for our dinner.

We sent one of the boys who had a wild Irish colt, fresh as paint, to Pigsty with orders for Ebba to abandon the place and meet us at the rock pile which was the boundary-line between the two estates. Before we reached Perilous, we could see Meredydd's lanky shape on the hill-crest, watching for us, and his strained face relaxed as we rode up.

"What'll we do with the Irishman—cut his throat?" he yelled.

"No," I said, dismounting, "we'll take him along for a hostage; he might turn out to be useful."

I FEAR Master Lugaid had a bumpy ride of it. Boru was strong enough to carry two, so I slung the lad across my saddle-bow, face down, after removing the awl out of his reach. The sun had worked its way out

I found the body of Dyfydd ap Huw lying near the well in the bailey—poor lad, he would never get that manor he had fought so well to win.

of the clouds at last when we collected Ebba and the others at the boundary, and then rode hell-for-leather down a certain short cut that we called the Road to Paradise, because it was so narrow and thorny, not to say rocky, slippery and downright dangerous. It was the quickest way to the lowlands, though, and even quicker when your horse sat down on his tail and slid. We had found it, chopped it out and marked it with axe-blazes in the early days of our occupancy. The horses hated it, and as we thundered down the first incline, with the horses standing on their heads, Lugaid stopped invoking me in Erse and howled in pure terror. Boru, who was a fidgety beast despite his speed and strength, quivered all over, and then swung his head around suddenly and knocked Lugaid as cold as last Friday's mackerel, so that he was quiet for a spell, thank God.

The Road to Paradise ended in a meadow gone brown and straggly with autumn, and we could see the gray of the ocean beyond. Dun Cathach lay due north. We let the horses breathe and talked earnestly about idiotic things like cures for the botts and what Ebba put into the soup last Tuesday, while our hearts hung cold in our breasts. I had again that crushing sense of fright at our scanty numbers. As to whether we were in Ireland rightfully or not, I'm afraid I gave it very little heed. We had been invited over by the King of Leinster to help him whip his foes, and if we were worthy of our hire, we would defend what was ours.

We spurred the horses again, and ran full tilt into a mass of terrified cattle, bawling, tails up, and driven by a few yelling betaghs. We untangled ourselves with difficulty, but our questions brought only screeches and waved arms.

We galloped on, and we soon got the answer a score of warriors in yellow shirts, well mounted, waving spears, and headed directly our way.

I heaved Lugaid gently into some bushes—how did I know they were thorn bushes?—and we advanced. Evan Vawr uttered a yelp of horror.

"It is our horses they are riding! Lord, it was the spirits of the dead you heard!" I went hot and then cold all over.

Well, this cattle-stealing party hadn't expected to meet us. They reined in in a hurry and some of the horses bucked and plunged. Behind me I could hear the gentle pluck, pluck of tested bowstrings, like a minstrel party tuning up. I leveled my lance, as did Milo beside me. We brought up our shields, ready for the charge.

"Pigsty aboo!" I yelled.

The yellow-shirts didn't understand the tactics of meeting a charge, of course, and it is disconcerting, when you are busy lifting cattle, to have two mailed knights come bursting out of the brush at you, followed by a thundering rush of mounted archers. Milo and I had to take what we could get, and the rest scattered widely. I had picked a large party in a chief's mantle. Our horses whammed together, and he reached for me with his lance like a man poking meat out of a cook-pot, and I got him through the belly. It was messy, but I couldn't help it; he didn't know how to meet my charge, and I couldn't show him.

The archers brought down a dozen or so, very neatly, and would have done more, but I bellowed at them to rally and let the horses go, wishing I had a horn to toot—it's hard to rally Welshmen who are interested in their work. I almost forgot Lugaid, but I remembered him in time, and rode back to pull him out of the bushes. Most of his clothes and some of his hide came loose in the process, and he screeched like a banshee.

Anyhow, we got going again, and some of the captured horses, recognizing their comrades, came running after us, whickering. We saw no more yellow shirts, but we smelled smoke, and thundered past clusters of huts with the thatch smouldering or flaring into flame, and men quiet in red pools before the doors, and women screeching.

"We're late," said Milo.

"Maybe," I answered, looking down thoughtfully for a moment at the frowsy dark head of Lugaid.

But when we saw the squat bulk of Dun Cathach at last, shouldering up the scudding clouds, and the hideous black birds sailing slowly overhead, we knew.

At first, we thought that there was not a living soul in Dun Cathach. St. Erne's stripped body, horribly hacked and maimed, sprawled before the great gate—his head had rolled farther down the slope. I saw that his silver cross had disappeared. It had not protected him after all.

In the paddock, in the hall where St. Erne had tried to deal justice to his new subjects, in the bailey, in the stables, lay the naked mutilated bodies of his men. And everywhere was blood, the smell of it, great gouts and smears and pools of it.

I had just found the body of Dyfydd ap Huw, lying near the well in the bailey—poor lad, he would never get that manor he had fought so well to win—when Milo came up and stood looking down at the dead man.

"In God's name, what happened, Brian?" he asked thickly. "They never could have taken the place by assault. And St. Erne was too wily a lad to be tricked."

"I don't know," I said. "There's no one to tell us. They're all dead." I sat down on the well-curb and put my head in my hands. I could hear the voices of our men, as they wandered around the fortress—the Welshmen bewailing their friends in that high shrill howl that turns a man's insides, and Ebba's steady stream of profanity cutting across it now and then. "I think I'll go question Lugaid."

"I'm with you," said Milo. He was still green around the mouth, for he had been violently sick at the sight of St. Erne. A fellow can't help his stomach, you know.

And then we heard a distant shout, and ran to the battlements where we had watched the shipwreck, long ago. A little knot of men were scrambling up the rocky slope, moving slowly and awkwardly, and carrying something that groaned.

Someone was left, after all, and now we would know.

(End of Part II)

ASK ADVENTURE

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

WHITE colts—albinos—and blacks.

Query:—Two rather recent books with horse "heroes" have referred to them as "white colts." In both cases it was stated that the sire was Thoroughbred, and the dam of good stock that made a good mating to produce the "hero" horse. Now to the question: Is any colt white when foaled?

My father was an old-time cowman, and familiar with hundreds of horses domestic and range, in Texas; was a horse breeder for many years, and raised Thoroughbreds as well as grade stock from his Thoroughbred stallions. I grew up with them. We never had any white horses, for the predominant Thoroughbred blood does not have any albinos. At least, I never heard of one; and my personal knowledge is fairly good; as well as having read much of the literature of Thoroughbreds. (My husband also being a breeder of Thoroughbreds.)

Once, as a child, I saw a white mare with a black colt, and this struck me as remarkable. I spoke to my father about it; of course at that age I really knew little, but was accustomed to seeing colts with more or less color resemblance. He told me then:

"Colts never come white. They are black until they shed their first coat."

In later years, I came to know something of the various ways Nature uses to protect the young; as the spotted fawn, without scent; and the mother skunk without scent while the young are small. Of course there are many others. And it strikes me that making the colt black is one of them; since a white colt would be much more easily seen by animals of prey. I am convinced that what my father said is true.

But there is still one question. I do not know anything of the Arabian horses; only that they have many whites. And it is possible that in the desert or semi-desert country, the protective black coloring would not be so good. Hence it is possible that in a strain with many albinos, the colts might show the albino also. Can you tell me? Or confirm or gainsay my father's word?

—Zoe A. Tilghman
3130 N. Barnes,
Oklahoma City 6, Okla.

Reply by John Richard Young:— At first glance, the answer seems to be No; actually, it's Yes. Colts destined to grow into "white" horses such as your father had in mind, it seems to me, when answering your question long ago, should not, strictly speaking, be classified as white. They are grays. As such Colts mature each succeeding new coat develops more white hairs and correspondingly fewer gray hairs, until eventually—and that "event" might result in four or five years, or be prolonged for twenty years or longer—the horse may finally be *almost* pure white; but rarely, if ever does such a gray horse "fade" to be an absolutely true, pure white. A very close examination of the coat will invariably reveal traces of the original gray.

The only truly pure white horses are Albinos, and their skins under the thin white hairs are pink. Usually the hair is so scanty an Albino horse, ranging free in strong sunlight, will become painfully sunburned. Albinos are foaled albino and never change.

Among Colorado Ranger horses—sometimes, though not with strict accuracy, classified with Appaloosas, and commonly referred to as Leopard Spotted horses—colts white like Albinos, but spattered with the distinctive dark spots of their own breeding (the spots ranging in size from the approximate diameters of a quarter to a half-dollar), are not uncommon. Like the Albino, the Colorado Ranger has a pink skin, but seems, generally, immune to sunburn. Indeed, as their name *Ranger* implies, they are physically fitted to range in the open the year around; they are husky horses, weighing from 1000 to more than 1300 pounds, and averaging about 16 hands tall.

They differ from the Appaloosa horse, which might be any color so long as it has the distinctive spotted croup, in that the Colorado Ranger's spots are black on a white-haired, pink skin; and these marking are *"embossed"* on the white coat so that they can be felt with your fingertips.

A foal's future color when adult depends much on the color *potentialities* of sire and dam; the potentialities, naturally, are not apparent to the eye. A black colt from a "white" (i.e., gray) mare, though perhaps not usual, is not rare. But "white colts," sired by a Thoroughbred and out of a hotblooded dam, belong, with Pegasus, in the realm of mythology —and on best-seller lists. Such colts would be albinos and, like you, I have never

heard of such of predominantly Thoroughbred blood.

From your last paragraph I infer that you believe white Arabs are common and that the Arab produces "many albinos." On the contrary, a pure white Arab is as rare as a pure black Arab. Many Arab-type Albino horses (and pintos, too) have been palmed off on ignorant buyers as "Arabians," much in the same careless way German shepherd dogs are promoted to "police dogs"; but, though Arabs frequently have white markings such as blazed faces, stockings, spots on the belly, etc., no Arabian studbook here or abroad registers albino or pinto horses. In crossbreeding, Arab blood usually proves to be an antidote to albinism and spotted coloring; and the Arabic word *Kehilan*, synonymous with our term *purebred*, might be freely translated as "Black-skinned." This does not, however, mean that an Albino or pinto horse cannot have some Arab blood.

About fifty per cent of purebred Arabs are bays, about thirty per cent are grays, with the remainder various shades of chestnut and brown, and rarely a pure white or a black, and *never* even a white rarity with pink skin. It is very likely that every one of the "white" Arabs you may have seen or heard of was actually a gray.

THE wild and woolly tale of Wild Cow Mesa.

Query:—I have a couple of questions concerning New Mexico which I would most sincerely appreciate having answered if possible.

First, are there still wild horses in New Mexico and if so, what section do they frequent?

And second, how much truth is there in the following statement which I recently read in a publication released by a prominent concern: "On Wild Cow Mesa there are great herds of wild cattle resulting from cattle stolen and hidden there by Indians." This paragraph was one of a group describing the Guadalupe Mountains in southeastern New Mexico. Is that statement true and in what locality is Wild Cow Mesa?

—Tom A. Martin
Enid, Okla.

Reply by H. F. Robinson:—We have had wild horses in New Mexico, at least until lately, but they were becoming a nuisance, eating feed that was needed for cattle and sheep, and as they were largely running on Indian reservation land, the Indians were directed to round up all horses that were really "wild" and all of their own that were not of much account or surplus, and they were sold to one of several plants established in the state where they were slaughtered, the fat and hides saved and the fats rendered out for war purposes, and the meat largely made up into dog food. While there may be a few wild horses left in the state I do not think there are many, and they would be found in the very rough or inaccessible parts of the state.

Your quotation regarding the "great herds of wild cattle" on Wild Cow Mesa in the Guadalupe Mountains resulting from cattle stolen by Indians:

I think that this is just a "wild" story. The Guadalupe Mountains are extremely rough and stray cattle that get in there may escape the roundup for years, but as to there being "great herds" in there that are ownerless, that is a fable I am sure. In almost any part of the mountains of the state there are maverick cattle that escape the roundups, maybe for several years, but finally are rounded up and the owner determined.

The Guadalupe Mountains are in the extreme southeast corner of the state, between the Pecos river and the Texas state line.

THE female of the species is more captious than the male.

Query:—How can I make a 7-months-old German Shepherd come on command? She minds pretty well in the house and outside when there is nothing to distract her. But if she wants to run off on her own or with another dog she pays absolutely no attention to my orders. I have taught her other orders such as sitting, staying, etc., with fairly good results, but when she does not wish to come to me, she simply does not come until I catch her by some means or she is ready to return.

—Laurence A. Gunnison
Niagara Falls, N. Y.

Reply by Freeman Lloyd:—In regard to your 7-months-old German Shepherd bitch which does not respond to your commands while at her liberty, you must bear in mind that as yet she is quite puppyish and desirous of playing with or chasing after other dogs of any age.

However, absolute command over her behavior may be attained by the use of a check-line attached to a training collar—as used in Germany and elsewhere for breaking army or police dogs. The collar is made of interchangeable metal links with gags on the inside. These may have blunt or sharp points, that when tightened by the pull of the slack line do *not* actually penetrate or lacerate the skin of the neck, but deliver a correcting effect on the dog. In other words, they punish without injuring the pupil.

To the collar attach a long woven line of the clothes-line kind. Before the rope is used it should be well soaked in a bucket of cold water. A wet rope will drag along the ground without becoming entangled.

Give the bitch her liberty, and when you want to stop her, just step on the rope where it is nearest to you and at the same time shout out your command of "Hup!" After a few such checkings she should stop when the command alone is given.

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)*

Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are still engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which were set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work was to be of secondary importance to their official duties. This was as it should be, and when you didn't receive answers to queries as promptly as we all wished, your patience was appreciated. Foreign mails are still slow and uncertain, many are still curtained drastically, but now that the war is over we can hope for a more expanded, smoother functioning *Ask Adventure* service very soon. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, care of *Adventure.*

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, care of *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Matawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

Camping—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Dogs—FREEMAN LLOYD, care of *Adventure.*

Fencing—COL. JEAN V. GROMBACH, care of *Adventure.*

First Aid—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Fishing: *Fresh water; fly and bait casting; bait camping outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, care of *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournament—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Health-Building Activities, Hiking — DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, care of *Adventure.*

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG, 3225 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee 8, Wis.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, care of *Adventure.*

Mountain Climbing—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Old Songs—ROBERT WHITE, 913 W. 7th St., Los Angeles, Calif.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *Foreign and American*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 170 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns, American and Foreign: Wing Shooting and Field Trials—ROY S. TINNEY, Chatham, New Jersey

Small Boating: *Skiffs, outboard, small launch, river and lake cruising*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Swords, Spears, Pole Arms and Armor—MAJOR R. E. GARDNER, care of *Adventure.*

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 1, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

Yachting—A. R. KNAUER, 6720 Jeffery Ave., Chicago, Ill.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal, customs, dress, architecture; pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U. S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R. BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, care of *Adventure.*

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America. Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

Ornithology: *Birds; their habits and distribution*—DAVIS QUINN, 5 Minerva Pl., Bronx, N. Y.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony, history, receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, care of *Adventure*.

Railroads: *in the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*.

Sunken Treasure: *Treasure ships; deep-sea diving; salvage operations and equipment*—LIEUTENANT HARRY E. RIESENBERG, care of *Adventure*.

Taxidermy—EDWARD B. LANG, 14 N. Burnett St., East Orange, N. J.

Wildcrafting and Trapping—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

Federal Investigation Activities: *Secret Service, etc.*—FRANCIS H BENT, care of *Adventure*.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police: *Its history, duties and tradition*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

The French Foreign Legion—GEORGES SURDEZ, care of *Adventure*.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, care of *Adventure*.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

Philippine Islands—BUCK CONNER, Conner Field, Quartzsite, Ariz.

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, care of *Adventure*.

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia and Tasmania—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, No. 1 Flat "Scarborough," 83 Sidney Rd., Manley N. S. W., Australia.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya—GORDON MACCREAGH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Bechuanaland, Southwest Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Cape Province, Orange Free State, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal, Rhodesia*—PETER FRANKLIN, Box 1491, Durban, Natal, So. Africa.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits, Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDEL, care of *Adventure*. **4** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, care of *Adventure*. **5** ★*Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C.

Europe, Part 1—*Denmark, Germany, Scandinavia*—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure*.

Central America—ROBERT SPIERS BENJAMIN, care of *Adventure*.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, care of *Adventure*.

★West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Iceland—G. I. COLBRON, care of *Adventure*.

Baffinland and Greenland—VICTOR SHAW, care of *Adventure*.

Labrador—WILMOT T. DEBELL, care of *Adventure*.

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** *Quintana Roo, Yucatan Campeche*—CAPTAIN W. RUSSELL SHEETS, care of *Adventure*.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **3** *Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, 579 Isabella, Pembroke Ont., Canada. **4** ★*Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario, National Parks Camping* — A. D. L. ROBINSON, 103 Wembly Rd. (Forest Hill), Toronto, Onto., Canada. **5** ★*Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta*—C. PLOWDEN, Plowden Bay, Howe Sound, B. C. **6** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask.

Alaska—THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 6520 Romaine St., Hollywood, Calif.

Western U. S., Part 1 *Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, care of *Adventure*. **3** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 720 W. New York Ave., Albuquerque, N. M. **4** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, Elks' Home, Elko, Nev. **5** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **6** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, Holbrook Tribune-News, Holbrook, Arizona. **7** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Middle Western U. S., Part 2 *Ohio River and Tributaries and Mississippi River*—GEO. A. ZERR, 31 Cannon St., Pittsburgh, 5, Penna. **3** *Lower Mississippi from St. Louis down, Louisiana swamps, St. Francis. Arkansas Bottom*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 716, Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Adirondacks, New York*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, 11331 Burin Ave., Inglewood, Calif. **5** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C.; S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, care of *Adventure*. **6** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 6)

he'd made in those few short months, and asked him to bridge the gap for us in a brief *Camp-Fire* notation. Here's what he answered—

Yes, it is, as you say, a far cry from the habitat of the old Tumblin River trapper to the hinterlands of Abyssinia.

Even now, when the treks that once took me many days are measured in hours by air, there is still that "far cry"—back into the past, back to the Biblical land of Cush, where many customs pre-dating the Christian era still exist.

And if you ever got a kick out of losing one calendar day when crossing the International Date Line, I suggest for a real thrill a flyer to Ethiopia this summer—back to 1939 (nineteen thirty-nine)! There is still that much difference in the modern calendars.

I owe my knowledge of Ethiopia to her greatest American friend, "Teddy" Roosevelt, who, through family acquaintance caused my first assignment in connection with American interests there. Later missions were concerned with Old World politics, strictly on my own. Gregory's role in the story of Herouba may give you an idea of the nature of these.

My initial trip was during the reign of Menelik II, when Addis Ababa was but a few years old—another Abyssinian anachronistic anomaly; for contrary to popular belief, the capital city is younger in years than the present ruler, Haile Selassie! Gondar, ancient city in the north near the headwaters of the Abai, or Blue Nile, had been the capital for centuries, until Menelik's warriors under Ras Makonnen (Haile Selassie's father) walloped hell out of the Italian army at Adowa in 1896. Shortly after his return from that victory, Menelik established the capital at Addis Ababa, because his wife liked the climate there.

I have known Ethiopia under four rulers, including Lij Yasu who succeeded Menelik in 1913 and was deposed in 1916 (and confined in golden chains in Ras Makonnen's fortress at Harar, even as "Ras Mulu Godouy" in the tale of Herouba); Empress Waizeru Zauditou, Menelik's daughter, who was only titular ruler with Ras Taffari as Regent; and Haile Selassie, whom I knew as young Taffari Makonnen.

The principal characters in "The Hand of Herouba" are, of course, fictitious. Casual mention is made of Menelik II, Ras Makonnen and his son Taffari, et al., only as incidental background; and I have purposely avoided specific naming of any of the European powers involved: the "Third Triumvirate" that signed the treaty of 1906 and whose diplomatic sparring at the time of the story forms the basis for its plot. There are still touchy spots, and I want to go back there some day on a little matter of unfinished business!

APROPOS of "A Jeep for Hakamoto" which appeared in our June issue, the author, E. Hoffmann Price, sends us a page torn from the April issue of *Bataan Magazine* published in the Philippines by Dr. Diosdado Yap, which carries, under the heading *Hostile Japanese Put At 4,000 In Philippines*, the following item—

As the battle between Japanese diehards and American-led Philippine Army troops on Lubang Island off Manila Bay apparently continues, the Commonwealth Government estimated that at least 4,000 Japanese soldiers still were terrorizing the back country.

President Sergio Osmena's secretary, who made the estimate of 4,000 Japanese troops at large in the Islands, said the biggest enemy forces numbered about 800 on Luzon and 600 in the Visayan Islands. In addition, he said there were possibly 2,400 members of the Makapili, a Japanese-sponsored force of Filipino renegades. A spokesman for the United States Eighty-sixth Infantry Division agreed with the estimates.

The United States Army has been following the practice since V-J Day of letting the Philippine Army do the mopping up with the aid of American officers and arms.

Only ten miles east of Manila the Eighty-sixth Division has a roadblock that stops all traffic toward Wawa Dam, scene of a fierce battle last summer. Cub plane pilots report that in hidden canyons they have seen garden patches apparently tended by Japanese, and former Philippine guerrillas say the Japanese in the Sierra Madre Mountains, 20 to 30 miles east of Manila, have in several cases holed up in camps that the guerrillas once used.

And in an adjoining column under the headline *Surplus Trucks, Food Aid P. I. Rehabilitation* is an account of the disposal of—among other items—some 700-odd jeeps to various Island enterprises now getting under way on a peacetime basis. No mention in the tallying-up of who got what or how many vehicles for how much, or of "one jeep to the Pete Barstow Rubber Development Corporation in payment for one dead Jap general." A serious error of omission and we're writing to chide Dr. Yap for his incomplete reportage in the next air mail!

Incidentally, the Price story was written months before the April issue of *Bataan Magazine* appeared in print. Who says we don't anticipate the news?

BY A CURIOUS coincidence, a few weeks after we had bought and scheduled Nat McKelvey's article on the United States Army Camel Corps which appeared last month, another piece on the same subject

arrived at our desk. This second manuscript, by William P. Schramm, duplicated, of course, much of the material which was covered in "The Camels Aren't Coming" but it also included some amusing sidelights on the aftermath of the episode which Mr. McKelvey had omitted. So that you might have the complete picture we bought the Schramm piece as well and print herewith excerpts from it which round out the serio-comic saga of those pre-Civil War GI "oonts." Mr. Schramm writes—

Talk to any old-timer in Arizona today and get him started reminiscing and he will tell you from one to a dozen camel stories, uproarious true incidents concerning the exiled dromedaries. One of them involves what happened in Phoenix in the summer of 1883 to Joe Porterie, then a young fellow working there as an assayer. His favorite pastime was gambling and he possessed such a sportive flair that he was willing to take a chance on almost anything. This led to his acquiring ownership of a camel.

It began when, one day, Porterie obliged a young Mexican friend with a ten-dollar loan. The Mexican promised to repay the money on a certain date; but when the day came, the youth appeared at Porterie's office to say that he hadn't acquired the cash yet. The borrower stated further that he had succeeded in capturing a camel up near the Harqua Hala Mountains. Would Joe care to accept the camel as payment? The idea of owning a dromedary struck the young assayer as a novelty and promptly he accompanied the Mexican to where he had tethered the beast. The camel changed ownership and Joe, with some difficulty, succeeded in pulling his humped prize home where he tied it to a big cottonwood tree. The beast promptly developed a sulking streak, refusing to drink or eat the hay its owner placed in front of it. "The poor thing is just lonesome. Camels get that way," Joe told his interested neighbors.

Shortly the neighbors began complaining about the camel. They couldn't get their teams to drive past the smelly brute and wanted it removed. Porterie listened courteously and with a little anxiety to the complainants but stood his ground.

Then one day the creature broke its halter-rope and at the same time overcame its sulking and started eating. It commenced operations on a maiden lady's prize garden, devouring it to the last vegetable root. Then it strode leisurely into its owner's unfenced backyard and set to eating hay. When Joe arrived home that evening he was just in time to see his ship of the desert munching the last mouthful of a week's hay supply.

As Porterie sadly watched the last few wisps disappear into the dromedary's mouth, the door of his house opened, and out came Frank Trott, Phoenix city marshal, who quickly told Joe that his neighbor, whose garden had been grazed off, had caused a nuisance abatement warrant to be made out against the camel.

"I'm sorry, Joe, but you've got just twenty-four hours to get that beast out of town," was Trott's parting ultimatum.

Joe didn't sleep much that night, but by morning a happy thought had occurred to him. A short distance from town lived a rancher friend of his. After breakfast Joe took his humped pet and lightheartedly led it out to the ranch. Here, for a nominal fee, he was allowed to turn the camel onto a few acres of luscious forage enclosed by a barbed-wire fence.

That night Porterie reposed in the slumber of one relieved of a burden. He was not in the least prepared for what happened the next morning. It seems that late the evening before several of the rancher's riders had come in with a drove of mules they had rounded up during the day. Totally unaware of what had been put into the fenced enclosure during their absence, the herders opened the gate and placidly drove the mules in. They'd scarcely closed the gate when they were startled by a panicky snorting. Next instant pandemonium broke out! Fence wires screeched and sparks flew as the terror-stricken mules crashed through them. Every mule vanished into the night.

Next morning Joe Porterie had an agitated rancher to deal with in his downtown office. As yet, he was told, the cowboys hadn't caught up with the mules, but when they did—well, mules had pretty tough hides, so they might not have gotten badly cut, but if they were, the bill for damages would be duly presented. But Joe's camel was still there, and he had to get it out of there immediately.

A short time later the woe-beset Joe was observed leading his dromedary dolefully back into town. Turning into the main thoroughfare he met an Indian to whom Joe offered a dollar for every mile he'd lead the humped nuisance away from the city and the redman could choose the mileage. The young buck accepted twenty-five dollars, took the camel's lead-rope and started west with it.

By the time he got to where the State Capitol building now stands, he had started the teams of three buggies and four surreys bolting down the street in runaways.

A block farther he met a four-horse team drawing a wagon loaded high with hay. That team, too, immediately stampeded. Upon reaching a street-end the fear frenzied animals turned a corner too sharply and upset the load, piling the hay into an irrigation ditch running through the city. In a matter of minutes excited residents of both sexes rushed out to form a hay-pitching brigade, but before they could clear the ditch nearby lawns had flooded and water was running into basements.

All this while the Indian led the camel

on with calm unconcern. Near the city's outskirts he encountered some ranch hands shepherding a drove of several hundred choice porkers to market. On inhaling one potent whiff of the dromedary the hogs let out a sudden chorus of snorts and fled helter-skelter in every direction.

By now the irate citizenry were ready to lynch the redskin camel drover. Fortunately he had gotten to the town's outskirts. Becoming aware of his precarious position, his stolidness gave way. Hastily unhaltering the camel he gave the beast a couple of whacks with the halter and made hurried tracks in the direction of his home.

Nothing further is known what became of Joe's camel; it didn't retrace its steps into Phoenix, which was a good thing. So it probably wandered off into the wilds and there rejoined its fellow-pariahs of the arid wastes. Some say that Porterie's dromedary venture cost him only thirty-five dollars; others claim that there was a lawsuit over the stampeded porkers and that the assayer had to pay for some that were never found and for the extra time it took to round up the others.

As for the camels, they wandered farther into the untrodden wilds. As the years went by, the intervals became longer between times when the brutes approached close enough to settled areas to frighten domestic animals. After about three decades they became so wild and wary that humans could no longer get up to them, and before long hunters were going after them with rifles. That Arizona even got to appreciate its camels is proven by the fact that the legislature enacted a law protecting them from hunters.

In 1912 the dromedary transport bubble was once more rudely punctured. That summer there came into Phoenix two smooth-tongued young men, effervescent with a Great Idea: To use camels as pack-animals in the Southwest. There was to be incorporated the Interstate Camel Transport Company. Its beginning would be the sale of stock shares until $100,000 was raised. Camels could be gotten from the East at about $100 a head. With glowing eloquence the two promoters painted a word-picture of the camel caravans that would soon be winding their way across the desert from Texas to California.

But the Great Idea didn't survive long enough for the share selling campaign to get under way. A few days after the arrival of the two transport wizards, several of the city's old-timers came into contact with them. One of these was Joe Porterie. The two promoters got an earful of truth about how Arizona's first dromedary venture had fared and it is said that the two wizards left on the next train!

Can any other Arizona old-timers contribute anecdote or reminiscence on Jeff Davis's dromedaries? We'd like to hear from you in *Camp-Fire*. And we're curious to learn when the last authentic report was made of anyone seeing one of the descendants of the original herd in the desert.

BILL GIANELLA of Oakland, Calif. adds the following interesting notation to Victor Shaw's answer to a query on "the Great Horn Spoon" which we published in the March *Ask Adventure* section—

> There used to be some horn spoons on exhibition in Golden Gate Park. If I remember right they were in the Academy of Science Building. I believe they are still exhibited from time to time. These were made by some Alaskan Indians. These spoons were made from the horns of Big Horn sheep. The ram's horn curve had been taken out and the material shaped into a ladle that would hold about a double handful and the handle was about a foot or more long. In my estimation the design, carving and other workmanship was equal to anything a silversmith could do.
>
> The oldest reference to a spoon I know of is the Chinese two stroke character number 21 called "bi." It is called a sacrificial spoon or a scoop. Even after some thousands of years of serving as a mark in writing it still has the outline of those Alaskan Indian spoons in Golden Gate Park. Could this Chinese character be taken from the "Great Horn Spoon"? The sacrificial spoon, the measurer and doler-out of ancient "Big Medicine"? If so, "by the Great Horn Spoon" must have been, in its day, an oath not to be used lightly!

WE WERE glad to receive the following letter calling attention to certain errors which appeared in "Freshwater Mystery" by R. A. Emberg in our March issue. E. C Durphy of Pontiac, Michigan wrote—

> . . . . the article was well written but the author is shy some facts. He writes "Pere Marquette *Eighteen* did not carry radio equipment. . . ."
>
> All the Pere Marquette carferries were at that time equipped with United Wireless Telegraph I K.W. sets with stationary spark gaps and self-induction type tuners employing a silicon or similar detector. The set on the *Eighteen* was operated by Stephen Sczepanek who functioned as both purser and wireless operator. The ship left Ludington, Mich., on the evening of September 8th, 1910, with a load for Milwaukee, Wis., and not for Manitowoc, as stated in the article. At exactly 4:25 A.M., Operator E. D. Bryant, of Ludington United Wireless station, heard the first C.Q.D. distress call sent out by Sczepanek of the *Eighteen*. Bryant responded immediately but evidently the *Eighteen* had difficulty in tuning him in as Sczepanek continued to

send out distress calls at intervals. In the meantime Bryant notified Pere Marquette officials and alerted all othe other lake stations. At 5:42 A.M. the *Eighteen* cut in with C.Q.D. and followed this with "P.M. Carferry 18 sinking in midlake help," each word repeated three times and sent in low, clean-cut Morse. At 6:30 A.M., the Pere Marquette carferry *Seventeen*, Lyman Hill, operator, reported standing by and at 7:30 A.M. sent the following message "18 went down at 7:30 A.M., 17 standing by."

The *Eighteen* went down about twenty miles offshore east of Sheboygan, Wis., stern foremost instead of by the head as shown in the article. Someone on the *Seventeen*—I believe it was Lyman Hill—took a kodak view of the sinking showing the bow high out of water at the final plunge. As the writer recalls the incident, there was also a tug from Port Washington at the scene, either at the time of the sinking or very soon afterwards, that assisted in recovery of the bodies. The *Nineteen* and *Twenty* and, I believe, the Pere Marquette Line steamer *Three*, arrived after the sinking.

The foregoing is taken from some notes taken at the time and preserved by the writer who was one of the force of United Wireless Telegraph operators at Ludington, Mich., at the time. J. E. Clark of 41 Moreland Ave., Pontiac, Mich., who was manager of the Ludington station at that time, can also verify most of these facts.

Mr. Durphy sounded like he knew what he was talking about and we hastened his communication off to Author Emberg who was as pleased as we were to have such expert checking on his research. He answers—

Dear Mr. Durphy:

Some years ago on the occasion of my first appearance in *Adventure*, I wrote for *Camp-Fire* something to the effect that the magazine had probably the most discerning reader audience in the United States. I reaffirm that statement now. They're just damned uncanny and dreadfully embarrassing to writers when said writer makes even one tiny little slip.

I was at sea myself on Lake Superior the day Pere Marquette *Eighteen* went down, and the news was flashed to us. I was a mere youngster and the loss of the vessel made a lasting impression on me. And many years later when I'd begun to write of the lakes the sinking of *Eighteen* remained very vivid.

Some years ago I began compiling case histories on the ships lost on the lakes from the time of *Le Griffon* forward. I gave it up; there were too many, but I did try to get accurate data on Pere Marquette *Eighteen*.

I wrote Pere Marquette at Detroit and on January 4, 1936 got a reply from A. E. Badger, General Superintendent. I won't quote it all, it's too long, but among other things it states specifically that the port of destination was Manitowoc. However, I am inclined to agree with you that it was Milwaukee, this from memory. Without further argument I'll award this round to you.

As to radio, (yes, we called it wireless back then) I have a clipping from a paper, I think the Ludington *Daily News*, and it was from this clipping that I assumed that the vessel carried no wireless. I quote:

"16 years ago today the Pere Marquette Steamer 18 sank in 800 feet of water midway between Milwaukee and Ludington *(note clipping says Milwaukee was destination)*. She was commanded by Captain Peter Kilty who went down with his ship. The vessel was loaded with 29 cars of freight and carried 58 persons *(Mr. Badger said 60)*. Thirty passengers and crew members were rescued by Pere Marquette 17 which appeared on the scene a half hour after Eighteen had plunged to the bottom head-first. After all these years the cause of the disaster has never been ascertained. Had wireless equipment been carried by this ship it might have been possible to have averted this heavy toll of lives. The loss to the company was well over a half-million dollars."

I am not trying to crawl from under. Your letter is too well documented. I'm simply trying to show how I pieced my data together; and I guess you win all three rounds. I appreciated your letter; for I like to hear from lakemen anywhere any time.

Cordially,
Ralph A. Emberg.

The above letters were, we felt, interesting not only in their own right but in that they serve as an admirable text for both readers of and writers for *Adventure*. We insist that our authors exercise every possible resource in making certain of their facts and the authenticity of the backgrounds they use in both articles and fiction. And we'd like to be able to insist that readers, when they spot an error or discrepancy, call it to our attention. Only by so doing can we be needled into keeping a continual weather eye peeled for those irritating boners that, down through the years, have been a traditionally minus quantity in these pages. We appreciate the spirit in which both Mr. Durphy and Mr. Emberg wrote. No mere carping criticism on the part of the former but a genuine wish to set the record straight. No eeling out or dodging the issue on the part of the latter but a genuine gratefulness for setting it so. A good example, we repeat, of what's meant by *Camp-Fire*—a place where readers, writers and adventurers *meet*.—K.S.W.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

High-test gasoline and imported Scotch don't mix any better today in a stream-lined car on a four-lane, arterial highway than did raw petroleum and unaged red-eye in the roaring boom towns of the Oklahoma Territory more than half a century ago when the wildcat kings were in their hey-day, trampling reservation Indians, cattlemen and farmers under sludge-muddied boots with indiscriminate abandon in their mad race to tap the rivers of black gold that flowed just beneath the surface of the prairie. . . . It's a gripping panorama of those fabulous days we give you next month in the stirring novelette—

"RED OIL"

By THOMSON BURTIS

"He is a elegant horse, Jeff," said Whistler, gandering at the nag on which he'd just squandered my last fifteen hundred cabbage leaves. "He ain't no dog, this Humidity. And he did look so lonesome." It was no wonder—considering the fact that, once a race got under way, that gee-gee never knew the company of his fellow bangtails. . . . A completely "different" horse-race story—

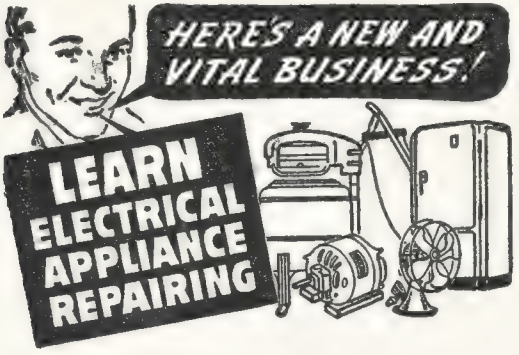
"WHISTLER'S MUDDER"

By WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

Bill Adams, a writer who knows the wind-ship days even as a Masefield or Morgan Robertson, spins a new yarn—"Breed of the Deep"—that makes them live again. . . . Jim Kjelgaard—in "Charley Hoe Handle and the Loony Trout"—gives us another chuckle-filled episode in the perennial duel between that nonesuch redman and his dearest enemy, Warden Horse Jenkins. . . . Hal G. Evarts returns to let us ride with a Thibetan horse-trader into Lolo territory and watch him beat a Texan Remount Service trooper at his own game. . . . Plus stories of the Connecticut River steamboating days by Carl D. Lane, tunneling operations under compressed air beneath the East River by Wilbur S. Peacock, the boxing ring by Joe Archibald, the big woods of the Northwest by Hector Chevigny and of the U. S. Army garrisons that kept Corregidor between World Wars by Edward Arthur Dolph. . . . And the usual interesting assortment of fact stories, features and departments you can find each month only in—

ON SALE AUGUST 9TH

NOW YOU CAN GET A
HEAVY DUTY
INDUSTRIAL WELDER
WITHOUT PRIORITIES
For Home Appliance, Auto and General Farm Equipment Repairs
for Only
$23.50
Complete
Works on Iron, Steel, & other metals—does work you'd expect from a larger, costlier machine; portable, easily carried; operates from any properly wired 110 volt line also available for 220 volt operation, at slight additional cost; has 8 metallic and carbon arc welding heat stages.
EASY TO OPERATE—if inexperienced you can learn to do professional work by following the simplified welding and operating instructions furnished—comes complete ready to operate with helmet, rods, cable, instructions, etc.
SAVE TIME AND MONEY—Do your own welding—just a few repair jobs will pay for this machine. A PRACTICAL AND PROFITABLE machine tool for any workshop. Make money doing repair work for others. Write today for full particulars and 10-day FREE Trial Offer.
DYNAMIC WELDER CO.
13 E. 23rd St.—NB
Chicago 16, Illinois



Offers Big Money—Independence

If you are mechanically inclined—can hold and use tools it will pay you to learn electrical appliance repairing. Operate from your garage, basement, etc. Work as many hours as you wish—the appliance repairman is his own boss. On many types of repairs it is usual for a repairman to charge on the basis of $5.00 to $6.00 an hour.

No Previous Experience Needed

Profusely illustrated our new course shows you in simple, easy to understand language plus drawings and photographs, how to make each repair on refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, motors, fans, irons, etc., etc. Explains and gives you a working knowledge of electricity, welding, nickel plating, etc. Shows you how to build the power tools you need and how to solicit and keep business coming to you. Not a theory course but an honest to goodness practical course written by and used by repairmen the country over. Price of course is so low that the savings on your household appliances will pay for it. Act now! Send today for FREE literature. **Christy Supply Co., 2835 N. Central Ave., Dept. D-1418, Chicago 34, Illinois.**

LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Henry O. Niles, Box 684, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, wants to hear from anyone knowing his father, Edward William Niles, born in 1890 at St. Paul, Minnesota. He is of Swedish descent, is 5 feet 7 inches, has blue eyes and blond hair. His left leg or foot is crippled. He was in the Army or Navy for 12 years, later worked in shoe factories and was employed by International Shoe Co., Kirksville, Missouri, from 1914 until 1916. He was seen in Kirksville in 1936-7. He was a machinist and also repaired sewing machines. He has lived in St. Louis and in Macomb, Illinois.

I would like to contact Jim Langdon of Sault Ste. Marie, who was last known to have been in St. Petersburg, Florida in 1926. Please write E. Langdon, 2010 S. W. 16th Terrace, Miami, Florida.

Wanted, information as to whereabouts of Everett "Nemo" Ruess, age 32; height 5 ft. 7, weight 140, wears size 9 shoes, black hair worn in single lock in front, goes bareheaded. Artist-cowboy-writer, he disappeared in 1934, again in 1935, from St. Petersburg, Fla. May be living with Indians in the Southwest or in Mexico. V. Summers, 805 Guerrero St., San Francisco, Cal.

Can anyone tell me the present whereabouts of Didier Mason, who dropped the first bombs in warfare, in the Mexican revolution, about 1912? He was in Belize after 1919, and then New Orleans. Edward F. Hinkle, c/o ADVENTURE.

Anyone knowing the address at the present time or in recent years of Frank Lester Gunter, please write Robert E. Mahaffev, Box 818, Oklahoma City. He was discharged from the Army in 1931. He was born July 29, 1903 or 1907, has lived in Dardanelle and Clinton, Arkansas; Wardin and Blackwell, Oklahoma; St. Louis; Granite City, Illinois. His father, T. C. Gunter, lived in St. Cloud, Florida, and Clinton, Arkansas.

(Continued from page 55)

"You're sure of that, Charlie?"

"Yeah, sure—yes, I'm sure of it, Bill."

Bill let him go, just easing his fingers, and Charlie moved away three feet, reaching up to massage his neck. He was mad, mad all the way through, but so scared he did not even dare look up, glare or mumble. Charlie had sneered at a man who had collapsed after taking twenty or thirty punches from a trained fighter, but that pain in his neck had cowed him, so that even with his mind lucid, he had no pride left. Bill felt in his pockets—he had a couple of dollars and some change. Probably not enough.

"How much?" he asked Gus, who understood that he wanted to pay for every drink he'd had, and told him the full amount.

"O.K. if I drop by tomorrow and settle?"

"Sure, no hurry, Bill."

"Thanks. So long."

Bill went out. He turned at the door and caught Charlie gesticulating mutely with both hands: Screwy, I don't know what's the matter with him! When he saw Bill looking at him, he froze, and his face started to fade again.

Bill walked home very slowly, and trudged up the four flights. He did not know what was the matter with him, either. Maybe he was screwy, punchy. Now, Charlie would hate him, and Charlie wasn't a bad guy. He'd said nothing tonight that a million other guys weren't saying. He'd just been making talk. Bill pulled himself together before going in. He had had a few drinks, quite a few, but he felt cold sober. His wife told him that the boy had returned a few minutes before and had gone right to bed. She thought he had had a quarrel, he seemed upset.

Bill shrugged and sat down to pull off his shoes. He knew what ailed the boy, and he understood himself through his son. The glory of the champion had been made up of some glory shorn from Bill. You couldn't just explain why, or how, but Jack had carried something of Bill's in there tonight, and that something had been mangled, shattered with Jack. Maybe all the men whom Jack had knocked over on his way up were suffering loss and humiliation tonight.

His wife was looking at him, saying nothing.

"Jack lost tonight," he told her.

She sat quiet for a minute, and the tears came. He felt a surge of gratitude for her understanding. He chuckled, tried to clear his throat, to say something appropriate, funny, but he found no words, no joke, and he ended by grinning sadly. His wife rose from her chair, came over and bent to kiss his cheek.

"My poor old William," she concluded.

THE END

CAN YOU FIX IT?

These wonder books tell step by step HOW to make difficult repairs and adjustments, how to keep a car at maximum efficiency, including latest improvements in car design and operation. Engine troubles and how to correct them well covered.

6 BIG VOLUMES

2800 pages, 2000 illustrations, wiring diagrams, etc., including Diesel engines. Beautiful modernistic, washable cloth binding.

AUTO

BOOKS ON APPROVAL

SEND NO MONEY. Just mail the coupon for a complete set of Six Big Auto Books, 20th Edition. Whether you are a mechanic or helper, expert or apprentice, auto owner or driver, take immediate advantage of this FREE EXAMINATION OFFER.

MAKE GOOD MONEY NOW
HOLD A PERMANENT JOB

America wants its automobiles kept in good repair. Men with "know how" are in demand, at big pay. These books will help you get and hold an important job, or give you a chance to go into business for yourself now or later. Any man who half tries to improve himself can learn auto servicing and repairing by this quick reference method. Use the JIFFY INDEX to find easily understood answer to any auto problem. These wonder books prepared by eleven of America's great automobile engineers. Many hundreds of valuable illustrations. Send the coupon TODAY.

A year's consulting privileges with our engineers now given with these books without extra charge.

Vocational Publishers Since 1898

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY, Dept. AC31
Drexel Ave. at 58th St., Chicago 37, Ill.

I would like to examine your Six-Volume Set of Auto Books. I will pay the delivery charges only, but if I choose I may return them express collect. If after 10 days use I prefer to keep them, I will send you $2 and pay the balance at the rate of only $3 a month until $24.80 has been paid. Please include consulting service as offered above.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Please attach letter stating age, occupation, employer's name and address, and name and address of at least one business man as reference. Men in service, also please give home address.

Get into ELECTRONICS TELEVISION for YOURSELF! RADIO

Get set in the greatest, soundest industrial boom in history. Be independent with YOUR OWN *lifetime business* or win success in a fine industrial position.

SHOP METHOD HOME TRAINING

from one of the World's Great Residential Technical Trade schools fits YOU for a profitable present and a growing future. QUICK, MODERN, SOUND speed-up course. Start earning after first few lessons. Above: Elsworth Anderson started his own business before he graduated. Thousands of great opportunities everywhere right now. Television just opening up. Electronics is in its infancy. NOW IS THE TIME FOR YOU to get started.

FREE LESSON

Find out what you can do yourself. See how easy and practical this training system is. Fill out the coupon for a sample lesson and big Opportunity book. No obligation. No salesman will call.

NATIONAL SCHOOLS
Los Angeles 37, California

MAIL COUPON

Paste on a penny postcard

National Schools, Dept. PP-8
4000 S. Figueroa Street, Los Angeles 37, California
Send the FREE Lesson, Vocational Book and details.

Name ..... Age .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone ..... State .....

☐ Check here if veteran of World War II

MECHANICS • HOME STUDY

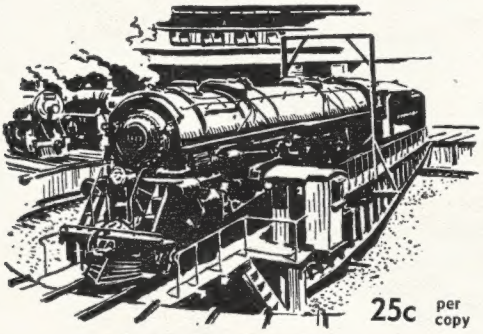
Step up your own skill with the facts and figures of your trade. Audels Mechanics Guides contain Practical Inside Trade Information in a handy form. Fully Illustrated and Easy to Understand. Highly Endorsed. Check the book you want for 7 days' Free Examination. Send No Money. Nothing to pay postman. ☐ Refrigeration $4 • ☐ Radio $4 ☐ Pumps & Hydraulics $4 • ☐ Machinist $4 • ☐ Diesel $2 ☐ Plumbers $6 • ☐ Shipfitter $1 • ☐ Welders $1 • ☐ Auto $4 ☐ Mathematics $2 • ☐ Electricity $4 • ☐ Carpenters $6 ☐ Marine $4 • ☐ Blueprint $2 • ☐ Sheet Metal $1.
If satisfied you pay only $1 a month until price is paid.
AUDEL, Publishers, 49 W. 23 St., New York 10, N. Y.

Learn modern watch and clock repairing

At home, spare time. Good field now ... security and contentment in future. Start part-time business and **EARN while you learn.** Horology is precision instrument work... a great and growing field, sensational opportunities. Easy self-instruction course. Low price. **Money-back guarantee.** Write today for **FREE** Success-Catalog!
NELSON CO. 1139 South Wabash Avenue Dept. 3HOS, Chicago 5, Ill.

Learn To MOUNT BIRDS

TAN SKINS—MAKE UP FURS
Be a Taxidermist. We teach you at Home. Mount Birds, Animals, Pets, Heads, Fish. Save your hunting trophies. Decorate home and den. Make Money. Mount and tan for others. Fun and Profit! Don't delay. WRITE TODAY—NOW—for
FREE BOOK with 100 game pictures. Hunters, get your copy—
It's Now Free. Send post card. State your AGE.
N. W. SCHOOL OF TAXIDERMY, Dept. 336C, Omaha, Nebr.



25c per copy

On the Table

——of contents for August, Railroad Magazine brings you a graphic analysis of the problems confronting a typical New England carrier in the post-war era; the exciting story of an engineer's first run at the trottle of a five-hundred-ton freight hog; a preview of America's newest streamlined train, photo-glimpses of railroad's hundred-birthday anniversary; a non-technical discussion of the methods used to air-condition passenger cars; plus dozens of true tales, featurettes, spot-news items, and outstanding engine and equipment photographs. Get your copy of America's best and biggest—

RAILROAD MAGAZINE

205 E. 42nd St., New York City 17

(Continued from page 107)

"I repeat, Grady, you planned the whole show between you."

"Word of honor. I never saw Mr. Duval before."

"You knew Quintero's secret. You guessed he was planning to finish off Enrique at the right moment. Why couldn't you slip down to Duval's the moment we'd docked in Orleans, and tell him just that?"

"Why should I waste my time—since he knew already?"

"Let's see how much he really knew. What chances he really took. If you did pay him a visit ahead of me, you could give him enough hints to let him play the mind-reader. Including my pursuit of Maria Genovar. The fact that I lost on aces over eights aboard the *Belle*."

"True enough, sir, but—"

"Let's say you *did* tell him those facts—don't bother denying it for the moment. He could fill it at his leisure, and plan his poker party. Knowing in advance that Enrique would rise to the bait. Admit you did show him how to palm a card."

"Aren't you leaving out those chicken-feathers on the bedspread, sir?"

"The feathers were put there by Quintero, in the hope that Enrique would be frightened. Naturally, he didn't want him to go to that poker party. When Enrique went regardless, Quintero's only hope was to mark him for dead *before* he left—with enough slow poison swimming in his blood stream to stop his heart in the next few hours."

"And how could Duval know that, Captain? Or the fact that aces over eights would end the play in his poker room? Or the fact that another dead man's hand, pointed at us, sent us aboard this ship as fast as we could run?"

Carter drew hard on his cigar. "Do you deny you saw Duval ahead of me?"

"By the book, sir—"

Captain and sergeant stood eye-to-eye on the deck. Perhaps it's the moonlight, thought Carter, but Grady's look seems without guile. He stumped down the deck toward the gleam of the saloon-lights, puffing thoughtfully.

"Put it this way, sir," said Grady. "The right man won. That's more than you can always say in poker—or in life."

"You may be right." Carter glared briefly at the moon, and spoke the first words that crossed his mind. "Perhaps there *are* more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy."

"I endorse that, sir," said the sergeant. "And speaking of poker, I see a game's just starting in the saloon. Would you mind if I joined it—now we're out of 'Gator Duval's aura?"

THE END

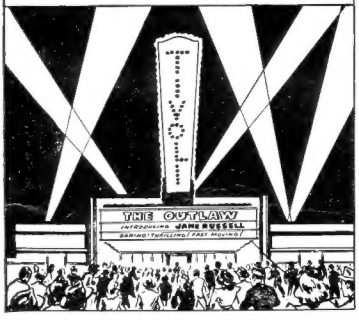
The Outlaw

HERE'S WHY THIS THRILLING NEW PICTURE HAS BEEN KEPT OFF THE SCREEN FOR TWO YEARS!

1944—**HOWARD HUGHES,** WORLD FAMOUS FLYER AND MOTION PICTURE PRODUCER, COMPLETES HIS PICTURE **THE OUTLAW.**

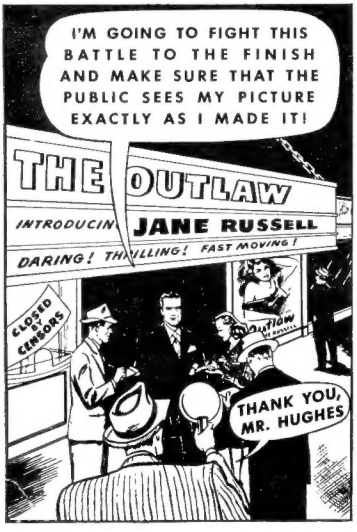
HOWARD HUGHES DISCOVERED JEAN HARLOW, PAUL MUNI, GEORGE RAFT, AND PAT O'BRIEN. NOW, IN **THE OUTLAW,** HE PRESENTS HIS SENSATIONAL NEW STAR DISCOVERY— **JANE RUSSELL**

JUNE, 1944—**THE OUTLAW** WORLD PREMIERE IS HELD AT SAN FRANCISCO. THE PICTURE BREAKS EVERY EXISTING RECORD!! HELD OVER FOR 8 WEEKS! PLAYS TO MORE THAN 300,000 PEOPLE!!



THE OUTLAW IS TRIGGER-FAST ACTION **COMBINED WITH DARING SENSATION TOO STARTLING TO DESCRIBE!**

THEN...**THE OUTLAW** IS BANNED BY THE CENSORS! BUT RATHER THAN CUT A SINGLE SCENE FROM THE FILM, **HOWARD HUGHES** WITHDRAWS IT FROM THE THEATRES OF THE WORLD.


I'M GOING TO FIGHT THIS BATTLE TO THE FINISH AND MAKE SURE THAT THE PUBLIC SEES MY PICTURE EXACTLY AS I MADE IT!
THE OUTLAW
INTRODUCING JANE RUSSELL
DARING! THRILLING! FAST MOVING!
CLOSED BY CENSORS
THANK YOU, MR. HUGHES

NOW, AT LAST, AFTER A TWO YEARS FIGHT WITH THE CENSORS, **HOWARD HUGHES** BRINGS YOU HIS DARING PRODUCTION, **THE OUTLAW...EXACTLY AS IT WAS FILMED!! NOT A SCENE CUT!!** AND INTRODUCING A NEW STAR, **JANE RUSSELL!**

"So that's why they took time out between sets"

A DELICIOUS Calvert highball is just about the best thing we know to make winner and loser *both* feel mighty pleased.

For when you serve up Calvert you're scoring with *the real thing* in whiskey. Its pre-war quality is so rich and flavorful, there's no imitating it.

The reason is simple. At Calvert we've blended more fine whiskey in our time than any other distiller in America. And that experience counts!

Want to make *your* service tops? Just be sure that your next highball is made with Calvert. . . . . ***It's the real thing!***

Clear Heads Choose **Calvert**

Calvert Distillers Corp., N.Y.C. BLENDED WHISKEY 86.8 Proof.
Calvert "Reserve"—65% Grain Neutral Spirits . . . Calvert "Special"—72½% Grain Neutral Spirits